

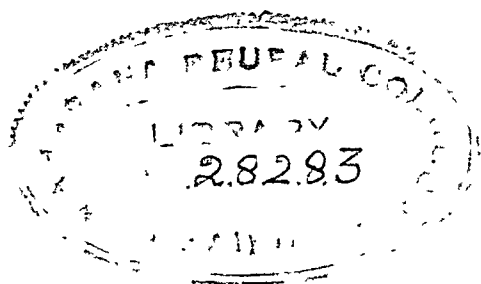
J. P. Patel

St Basil's, Moscow, from under the Kremlin walls

MOSCOW
GEORGIA—THE CRIMEA
AZERBAIJAN—NIZHNI NOVGOROD
RUSSIAN PANORAMA
LENINGRAD—STALINGRAD—THE UKRAINE
THE VOLGA—SIBERIA—SOVIET AND
CHINESE CENTRAL ASIA
THE ARCTIC AND BALTIC
POLAND—HUNGARY

K. P. S. MENON

Indian Ambassador at Moscow 1952-61



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TO MY BROTHER
WHO HAS BEEN
MORE THAN A BROTHER
TO ME

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
DELHI-CHUNGKING (1947)

FOREWORD

DURING the years 1952 to 1961, when I was the Ambassador of India to the USSR and concurrently accredited to Poland and Hungary, I kept a travel diary as well as a political diary. This book has emerged out of the diary of my travels. The journeys to the various Republics of the USSR have been arranged more or less in the order in which they were performed. I visited the different Republics of Central Asia at different times and the descriptions of those journeys have been brought together in a single chapter. So have the journeys to Poland and Hungary. There is also a chapter on Chinese Central Asia, which I had previously visited in 1944. Then it took me 46 days of riding and walking to reach Kashgar from Kashmir ; now, I flew in a little over an hour from Alma Ata, capital of Kazakhstan, to Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang. This is symbolic of the speed with which Sinkiang has been flung headlong from a primitive state into a People's Democracy.

This book is a travelogue and not a political memoir. Some political observations, however, may have strayed into it, as into the chapters on Hungary and Poland, which saw exciting events, especially in 1956. Such observations reflect my personal views and not necessarily those of the Government of India.

If this book is not a political memoir, still less is it an economic study. Factories leave me cold. By training and temperament, I am enthralled by the beauty and history of the places I visit and the charm and oddities of the people I meet rather than by the statistics and indices of production and distribution. In any case, the grandeur of the industrial structure erected by the Soviet Government is too well known to need reiteration.

I am indebted to my good friends, J. P. Patel and P. N. Sharma, for the photographs in this book, and to Thomas and Mira Abraham, who accompanied me on some of the journeys described, for kindly undertaking to read the proofs.

I am profoundly grateful to the Soviet Government for having enabled me to travel so extensively and even in regions normally closed to foreigners. I can never forget the courtesy, kindness and often overwhelming hospitality which I received

from the officials of the various States. Still less can I forget the man in the street—whether in Moscow or Warsaw, Baku or Budapest, Tashkent or Tbilisi, Leningrad or Stalingrad, Yalta or Yerevan, Alma Ata or Astrakhan—who never betrayed the slightest symptom of the foreign devil complex and was always friendly, kindly, and after Stalin's death, charmingly inquisitive. The names of those who helped, consciously or unconsciously, in the making of this book are too numerous to mention. Some have found a place in the book, all have a niche in my heart.

K P S M

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P. N. Sharma

Queue at the Lenin Mausoleum, Moscow

MOSCOW

THE LENIN MAUSOLEUM

IN Moscow my first visit was to the Kremlin to present my credentials to President Shvernik; my second, to the Lenin Mausoleum. It was late autumn. Winter was approaching and had already sent its herald in the form of a premature fall of snow. But, like a conqueror who is a little unsure of himself and of the reception he is likely to get, winter seemed to be hesitating whether to burst in and settle down for the season or whether to withdraw for a while and come back later in full force. The air was damp and the roads were slushy. The dismal weather, however, did not affect the perpetual flow of pilgrims to the shrine of Lenin. Stretching through the Red Square and at right angles to it, there was a long queue of men, women and children, who had been waiting patiently for hours to be ushered into the presence of Lenin for the prescribed two minutes. I almost felt caddish when we flitted past this line of mourners in a capitalistic Cadillac (though the proletarian Zis is no whit less imposing) and went ahead of them into the mausoleum.

At the entrance to the mausoleum we were received by the Chief of Protocol. Two sentries, who had been standing motionless outside the mausoleum and looked as if they had been carved into the wall, sprang to life and saluted. We were then taken slowly to a subterranean chamber. There lay Lenin in a glass case, brilliantly flood-lit. Involuntarily I held my breath.

It was the first time that I had seen an embalmed body. In fact, I have seen very few dead bodies, embalmed or unembalmed. How secluded my life has been from the tragedies of this century! I belong to a generation which saw two world wars, has all but forgotten them and is busy preparing for another. These wars resulted in the death of millions; yet the number of deaths I myself have seen can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Those few have left a vivid impression on my mind—the death of a sepoy in Peshawar, kicked by a horse and killed; Dr Kurien,

a scoffer at priests all his life, whom the priests took into their custody the moment his life was extinct, Cruickshank, a British engineer who spent all his life in Bharatpur and gave it up after a hard game of tennis, Muttoo, the young and handsome brother of the Maharaja of Bharatpur, who had all his education in England and came back to India, only to die, and my mother, who looked as serene in death as in life. And now Lenin. He seemed to be not dead but asleep, not even asleep, but *resting*. Resting with a quizzical expression on his face, *resting*, as he deserved to rest after letting loose the spirit of revolution on his people and as he had hoped, on the entire human race.

I understand that it was not without hesitation that the decision was taken to embalm Lenin's body. He himself had expressed no views on the subject, unlike Mahatma Gandhi, who had left explicit instructions that his body should not be embalmed. Perhaps the thought never crossed Lenin's mind that his body would be preserved. The intellectuals of the time were against it. Stalin, however, was in its favour, he knew his people better than the intellectuals. For centuries the Russian people had had something to worship, they had worshipped a long succession of saints. Henceforward Lenin would be their saint, their saviour. He would lead them to the Promised Land.

I laid a wreath, made of chrysanthemums, on Lenin's tomb. It bore the inscription 'To the undying memory of V I Lenin from K. P. S. Menon Ambassador of India to the Soviet Union.' I gave my full designation, for I was told that the ribbon which bore the inscription would be detached and kept permanently in the Lenin Museum. Thus, in paying homage to the immortal memory of Lenin, I have also immortalized myself!

Prakash Kaul who lunched at the American Embassy, told me that his hosts were intrigued at the thought that the Ambassador of India should have laid a wreath on Lenin's tomb. 'Was India definitely going Red?' they asked. I saw no reason why I should not lay a wreath on Lenin's tomb, even as I had laid a wreath on Sun Yat sen's tomb at Nanking and as all new Heads of Missions in India lay wreaths, soon after they present credentials, at Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi. Surely, Lenin is as much a father of the Russian people as Gandhi is of ours.

Leaving Lenin's body we proceeded to see the graves of other famous revolutionaries in the compound. Among them were

Krupskaya, Lenin's wife; Kalinin, a lathe operator in Leningrad, who became the Head of the Soviet State; Zhdanov, who created the Cominform after the war and reduced art and literature to the position of minions of communism; Dzerzhinsky, a co-worker of Stalin in his early days and Minister for Internal Security in the first Soviet Government; General Frunze, who played an important part in the Civil War following the Revolution; and Maxim Gorky, the great writer.

Among them, none is worthier than Krupskaya, a revolutionary in her own right and a distinguished educationist. The spirit of this woman may be seen from her exhortation to the people after Lenin's death:

Comrades, men and women workers, men and women peasants! I have a favour to ask from you. Do not pay external respect to Lenin's personality. Do not build statues in his memory. He cared for none of these things in his life. Remember, there is much ruin and poverty in this country. If you want to honour the name of Lenin, build children's homes, kindergarten schools, libraries, hospitals, homes for the crippled and for other defectives.

Evidently, Stalin was not wholly in agreement with her, for this land is littered with statues and other memorials, not merely to Lenin, but, in equal profusion, to Stalin himself.

ZAGORSK

IN the last week of November, 1952, we went to Zagorsk. It was a bleak, wintry day. Most people prefer to do the trip in the spring or early summer; then the journey which took us four hours should not take more than two. The road was cut up by the snow and, in some places, covered with ice, so much so that we felt that we were driving on glass. The cold was intense; it was 50 below zero; and the sun was hardly visible. At midday the sun emitted no more heat and light than in the morning or in the evening. The sky and the earth seemed made of the same substance, only differing in the degree of its thickness and whiteness. There was no such distinction as in India between the

brown earth and the blue sky, here both were grey and white, the one seemed to merge into the other as inseparably as the faces of Lenin and Stalin in those composite portraits of theirs which are scattered all over Russia

Despite its discomforts, the journey was memorable For one thing, we saw General Winter in all his majesty The entire earth seemed to belong to him, indeed, it did not look like the solid earth but rather like the milky sea of Hindu mythology, suddenly frozen at the General's command From this sea of snow stood out, here and there, a handful of trees, ghosts of their former selves, leafless and lifeless There also peeped out a few huts dots on an infinity of snow Now one understands why Hitler and Napoleon quailed before General Winter and why their armies, decimated, retreated into their homelands I wish someone would make a statue of General Winter as Mme Mukhina has done of Industry and Agriculture That statue, in which Industry and Agriculture are represented by a man and a woman surging forward with vigour and movement and carrying the hammer and the sickle, stands on the outskirts of Moscow.

The last part of the journey was more interesting than the first The landscape was more varied and more undulating At first we passed through the suburbs of Moscow which were as depressing as suburbs anywhere A suburb has the disconsolate air of a satellite, clinging to something else, drawing blood from it and often giving blood to it, ashamed that it has no life of its own and yet afraid to develop an individuality of its own Very different were the towns through which we passed towards the end of our journey I was specially attracted by a town called Pushkin, with a beautiful old church dominating it The very name attracted me Did it have anything to do with Pushkin, the great Russian poet, I wondered Last week I saw a portrait of him on the mantelpiece of Zallaka the Ethiopian Minister in Moscow Was he a special admirer of Pushkin? I asked. 'Yes' he said, 'moreover, Pushkin was half Ethiopian' Then I came to know that his grandfather was an Ethiopian slave who had been bought in Constantinople by a Russian noble and presented to Peter the Great Peter looked after him well and had him educated, and Pushkin was his grandson Was his oriental ancestry, I asked myself, responsible for the tumult in

his blood—a tumult which gave such pathos to his life and such beauty to his poetry?

After we had done about 60 miles we had our first glimpse of Zagorsk. It was most impressive. There loomed in the distance a hilltop, covered with towers, turrets and domes. The road suddenly dipped, causing this apparition of architectural beauty to vanish; and then, equally suddenly, it rose again, enabling us to take in the details. In the centre was a tower which rose above, but did not dwarf or dominate, the surrounding buildings. This tower, however, does not belong specially to Russia; it could be seen anywhere in Europe or, for that matter, in Asia. It was a late eighteenth-century addition. The churches, on the contrary, were Russia's own. They had a cluster of bulbous domes, which Westerners call 'onion domes' but which we in the East more respectfully call 'lotus domes'.

Our entry into Zagorsk was marred by a mishap. We drove on beyond the entrance to the Church and had to turn back. In reversing the car we ran into a ditch on the side of the road, full of snow; and our driver found it difficult to extricate the car. Shovels and pickaxes had to be sent for; quantities of snow had to be removed; and mud and sand thrown into the ditch. Even so, the car would not move though its wheels continued to revolve, like the wheels of the United Nations which turn day and night and yet do not move on to a solution of the world's troubles. Eventually, the villagers who had gathered together, attracted by the sarees which our ladies were wearing and the red marks on their foreheads, gave us a hand. Gleefully they all joined together to push the car out of the ditch. This Russian crowd was like any group of villagers whom a casual wayfarer might meet in India. They were equally courteous and inquisitive, good-humoured and helpful. Human beings, communists or not, are the same everywhere. Marx cannot change human nature any more than Manu could.

Zagorsk is so named after a political revolutionary who had been an underground worker for many years before the Revolution and was assassinated in Moscow soon after. Previously it was named Sergeiv, after Sergei, the son of a nobleman, who lived in the fourteenth century. Tired of the idle luxury of a boyar's life, he renounced the world and gave all his wealth for the founding of a monastery. This monastery, built in 1340, was origi-

a wooden one, but was replaced in 1422 by a stone church. By that time Sergei himself had become a saint. His body had begun to work miracles. Its survival was itself a miracle, for the monastery was attacked and destroyed by the Tartars at the end of the fourteenth century, but the body remained intact. So indeed did his spirit. For over 500 years his spirit used to be called upon by millions of pious people in Russia to intercede between them and God.

We went to Zagorsk, wondering whether the church was still in use. We were a little apprehensive that it might have been turned into an anti-God museum or, perchance, a storage depot as the Novospassky monastery near Moscow, founded in 1466, has been. Our fears were set at rest when we heard the melodious singing from inside the church. We went into the church, passed a row of beggars and saw the beautiful frescoes and icons which had recently been renovated with care. This church was very different from any that I had seen before. It had no seats, no pews reserved for the gentry, no organ and no choir. The worshippers were very different from the faithful who assemble in front of a mosque or the congregation who, dressed up in their Sunday best, go solemnly to church on Sundays. In fact, it was no congregation at all, it did not have that momentary unity which comes over the worshippers in a Muslim mosque or a Christian church. It was rather like a crowd of worshippers in our Hindu temples, each man having no thought of his neighbour or even of himself but only of the God whom he is worshipping. I can never forget the devout looks on the faces of the men and women—mostly women, in the Uspensky cathedral in Zagorsk or the sweetness of their singing which seemed to come from the depths of their soul.

Leaving the churches we visited some of the adjoining museums. One of them contained a collection of Russian handicrafts, another contained objects of interest to students of medieval Russian history. I was interested in two very different objects. One was a book which was kept by Ivan the Terrible and in which he had entered the names of all the men he had killed, beginning with his own son. I was reminded of the banner of Genghis Khan which I saw when I visited his tomb in Lanchow in 1944 and on which was hung a hair from the head of every one of his innumerable victims. The other object which attracted me was

the robe of St Sergei. Looking at this robe I tried to form a mental picture of the man. He appears to have been tall, lanky and emaciated; and his robe of mauve colour, with a blue background, was simplicity itself. Very different were the other embroidered robes which were exhibited in the museum. They were studded with pearls and rubies, emeralds and diamonds; and the mitres were made of gold. The Christianity of Sergei was different from the Christianity of the bishops, even as Roman Christianity was different from the Christianity of the Apostles. Seeing the magnificence of the bishops' and archbishops' robes displayed in the Zagorsk museum, I recalled a famous description of Christianity: 'The ghost of the Holy Roman Empire sitting crowned on the grave thereof.'

THE BALLET SCHOOL

THE first week of January, 1953, was in many respects the best since we arrived in Moscow. It was cold, crisp and clear. The temperature dropped 15 degrees below zero, but there was not much snow. Such snow as we had was of the fine, powdery kind which could be easily swept off the streets.

The sun was often bright. Bright, but not hot or even warm. Not for one moment could we dispense with our fur coats or fur caps. Anujee accompanied me, bare-headed, to Gogol park yesterday and got a crick in the neck which I offered, but forgot, to massage with medicated oil. The sky, instead of wearing its perpetually monotonous mantle of white, turned pink in the mornings and evenings and remained blue for the rest of the day. A couple of nights ago we could even see the stars. And in the morning when I, as usual, woke up at six, while the rest of Moscow was asleep, and looked out of the window in my office, I saw a lovely moon fading behind the trees in front of our house.

Politically there were no alarms. The General Assembly adjourned for a hard-earned, if not well-earned, rest; and the nations of the world were spared that mutual abuse and recrimination in which representatives had been indulging in New

York There was a lull in the fighting in Korea, and the heat generated by the Indian resolution on Korea in the General Assembly had subsided

During this week I paid my first formal call on Vyshinsky, the Soviet Foreign Minister He was friendly, but I could not help remembering that this was the man who only a few weeks ago spat fire against our resolution on Korea and thundered 'At best you Indians are dreamers and idealists, at worst you are instruments of horrible American policy'

In a politically uneventful week we had an interesting experience We paid a visit to the Ballet School We had to climb many flights of stairs to reach the Director's office On our way, we passed three or four young girls of ten or eleven who smiled, bowed and curtsied to us There was something charmingly old worldish about the way they curtsied It was very different from the curtsy which the buxom wife of a high Indian official once attempted at a Viceregal banquet in New Delhi On such occasions Indian women generally used to fold their hands in the normal Indian way instead of curtsying in the Western fashion One fashionable Indian lady however attempted to bend her knees in curtsy with the result that she crashed to the floor, and the Viceroy's ADCs had to spend many agonizing seconds in trying to hoist her up to a vertical position

The Director of the Ballet School explained to us the origin and purposes of the school It was founded in 1773 It was thus 179 years old *three years older than the Bolshoi theatre*, of which this school had come to be the principal feeder Its object was to train boys and girls between the ages of ten and nineteen into ballet dancers At present there were 200 students Anyone who was found wanting during the nine years' course was discharged This did not involve much hardship as the school gave a general education, in addition to specialized training in dancing and anyone who was discharged at any stage could continue his general education in some other school

We were first taken to a class of beginners In this class the boys and girls were taught simple leg movements They had to repeat these exercises over and over again so that their limbs might gain the necessary strength and suppleness The teacher asked one of the girls to come forward and we were astonished at the way in which he manipulated her legs forwards

and backwards, to the right and to the left, and round and round, without causing the slightest discomfort to their owner.

We were then taken to a middle class. There we saw girls of about 14 and 15 dancing. They were in an interesting stage; they were half way through their course. They had done some four years' training; and another four or five lay before them. They had overcome the diffidence of the students of the class which we had just visited, but had not yet gained the superb self-assurance of the pupils of the class which we were to visit a few minutes later. I said that they looked like little butterflies which had learned to fly but could not yet soar into the heavens. The teacher was pleased with my remark.

Next we went to the highest class. By that time we had learned how intense was their training, how rigorous their time-table, how strict their diet and how intimate the attention paid to every detail of their lives. In particular, the school had a band of devoted teachers, mostly former ballet dancers who were now too old to dance. We then saw the finished products of this training. They entertained us to a half-hour display of dancing. It was as if we were witnessing some minor, but highly delightful, interlude in the Bolshoi theatre itself. The dancers were radiantly happy and supremely self-confident. They were in the same mood as an Oxford man who gets that rare distinction, a First, and to whom all avenues in life are open. Before them lay a path, strewn with 'roses, roses, all the way' and with no political thorns. Happily, politics has not yet invaded the world of the ballet.

After showing us round the classes, the Director topped his kindness by treating us to a concert. It consisted of three or four items, of which the most charming was a scene from *Nutcracker*. There is no politics in *Nutcracker*. It is sheer fantasy. Masha, a little girl, is taken to a Christmas party and gets a nutcracker as a present. But she has a quarrel with her little brother and forgets to take it home. In the night she dreams that she is a grown-up girl and goes to the drawing-room to fetch the nutcracker. A fierce fight is in progress between the nutcracker and his toy soldiers and the King of the Mice and his valiant followers. The Nutcracker is on the point of losing the battle when Masha hurls her slippers at the Mouse King. The spell is broken, the mice disappear and the Nutcracker turns

into a beautiful prince, and Masha and the prince sail away in an open boat on a silver sea. The play ends with Masha waking up and seeing the nutcracker and her doting nurse by her side.

THE BOLSHOI THEATRE

THE thirtieth anniversary of our marriage fell on the 21st of April. Our friends were more than kind to us on that day. The diplomatic and non-diplomatic members of the Chancery joined together and gave us a set of Russian gramophone records. In addition, Prakash Kaul gave us a decorative Russian tumbler and Pillai and Devi a pair of Chinese cushion covers. Kunja gave Anujee a lovely bag and wrote a poem to me which touched my heart.

You taught me to love the first drops of rain
Upon the parched earth,
And all the loveliness of life and birth
You showed me again and again.

You taught me to wonder at the flutter of wings
And the rapture of sun-drenched trees,
At the ocean's anger, and the vagaries
Of men and things.

All the loveliness of life—and even
The glory of death
You taught me to love from my childhood breath
All earth all heaven.

In the afternoon we went for a drive to Khimki, the river port. We wandered about on the banks of the river and among the woods, still pregnant with spring. And in the evening we went to the Bolshoi theatre and saw *The Red Poppy*.

General Cariappa once told me that Novikov had remarked that as compared with Moscow, Delhi was just a big village. Where, he asked, was your opera house, your national ballet, your State theatre? We had none of those things then in Delhi. We had, of course, the Birla Temple, but the Birla Temple is not exactly a substitute for the Bolshoi theatre.

Here, more than 30,000 Muscovites go to the theatre every day, except on Mondays when the theatres are closed. There are as many theatres in Moscow as there are colleges in Oxford. These are of different kinds—the Bolshoi and its sister theatre, the Filial, specializing in ballets and operas, the Art theatre, the Satire theatre, the Puppet theatre, the Gypsy theatre and so on. Not a week has passed since our arrival here when we have not been to the Bolshoi at least once. There is not much scope for recreation in Moscow. Russian company is not to be easily had and the company of diplomats cannot be avoided. The Bolshoi theatre therefore has been our grand refuge from boredom.

It is not merely a negative satisfaction that the Bolshoi gives you. To see a ballet like *Romeo and Juliet* is a spiritual experience. Another ballet which we are never tired of seeing is *Swan Lake*, or, as Malik, the Deputy Foreign Minister, put it, *Goose Lake*. When Vyshinsky was away at the United Nations, most of my dealings had been with Malik; and I found him very friendly. A few weeks ago I tried to play a practical joke on him at one of our parties. I took an Indian lady, Mrs Malik, to him and introduced them to each other saying, 'Mr Malik, Mrs Malik.' Malik was taken aback for a second but quickly recovered and said that he was not surprised at this joke. In New York, where he had been the Soviet Union's representative to the United Nations, there used to be four Maliks—a Malik from India, a Malik from Lebanon, a Malik from Pakistan and a Malik from Russia. We almost thought of founding a Maliks' Club, he said.

To a lover of pure ballet *Swan Lake* is even more satisfying than *Romeo and Juliet*. The music by Tchaikovsky is sweeter and there is more scope for dancing, especially group dancing, by the Bolshoi's chief glory, the *corps de ballet*. For a gifted ballerina, there is scope for expression, too. In this ballet there is Odile, the black swan, as well as Odette, the white swan. The white swan represents love in its pure, and therefore, pathetic form; the black swan represents carnal passion, demanding, rapacious, demonic. Plisetskaya, second only to Ulanova, took the part of both the black swan and the white and did equally well in each. Indeed, when one saw the wicked gleam in her eyes and heard her diabolical laughter at the prince falling, bewitched, at her feet one almost thought that she was more effective as the black swan.

Ulanova seldom dances in *Swan Lake* nowadays. I am told that in her day she made an exquisite Odette, but she could never do full justice to Odile, the black swan. Somehow she could not put her heart into that part which, she knew, did not suit her.

Another interesting ballet which we saw recently was the *Fountain of Bakhchiserai*. It is based on Pushkin's romantic poem by that title. The theme is unrequited love, of which Pushkin had had an excruciating experience in the Crimea. There he fell deeply in love with Maria Rayevskaya who, however, was unable to return it. While staying with her people in the Crimea Pushkin visited the fountain of Bakhchiserai which exists to the present day. In this ballet, too, there are two heroines—Maria, the frail, innocent girl, with whom Khan Girei fell deeply in love and of whom Pushkin's own Maria was the prototype, and Zarema—the queen of the harem who, in a fit of anger and jealousy, kills Maria. It is characteristic of Ulanova that she always danced Maria in this ballet, while Plisetskaya made a superb Zarema.

Very occasionally one sees a political ballet on the stage. Almost the only one shown nowadays is *The Red Poppy*. Originally anti-British, it has now been made anti-American. One sees American ships selling arms to China, and Russian ships bringing food to China. On the whole, however, the political content of the play leaves little impression on the audience. What they, and we, remember is the beauty of the Chinese dances and the melody of the Chinese tunes.

The fact is that political ballets are not particularly popular on the stage in Moscow. Neither the producers nor the performers are fond of them, and least of all, the audience. A few years ago, a very political ballet, *Svetlana*, was put on the stage in Moscow. It dealt with the resistance which patriotic peasants put up in a frontier village against the foreign agents in their midst. The theme was thus highly dramatic and yet the ballet was an utter failure and was promptly discontinued. That ballet was produced in the very year in which *Romeo and Juliet* was put on the stage, but while *Romeo and Juliet* is still going strong, *Svetlana* is completely forgotten.

It is worth going to the Bolshoi theatre not merely to see the actors but to see the audience. Nowhere have I seen such sympathy between the actors and the audience. It is more than

sympathy; it may almost be called communion. The audience responds instinctively to every word, every tune, every gesture on the stage. It is as if the spectators lie suspended on the lips of the singers, on the lovely legs and arms of the ballerinas. For four hours they forget all their earthly worries and are transported to a different world altogether—a world, mythical or historical, a world of gods and goddesses, or a world of heroic ancestors, vibrant with vitality and full of frolic. Tomorrow they may wake up and read in *Pravda* of the wicked designs of the 'Anglo-American war-mongers' and the horrors of the war they are thirsting to let loose on the Soviet Union and the peaceful Peoples' Democracies of Asia and Europe. But that would be tomorrow; tonight they can sleep in peace, dreaming of Romeo and Juliet, Odette and Odile, Maria and Zarema, Cinderella and the Sleeping Beauty and all those gorgeous men and women who throng the stage and sing and dance.

Happy the people who have at their disposal such a wonderful means of escape from reality. And astute the Government which spares no pains or money to make this escape as delightful as heart can wish. If religion was the opiate of the people in the Tsarist days, the ballet and the opera serve the purpose equally well today—and, in fact, better, for they do not compete with the State for the possession of man's body and soul.

ULANOVA AS JULIET

ONE ballet which we are never tired of seeing is *Romeo and Juliet*. Here is an English play, with an Italian setting, transformed into a Russian ballet, as if it were native to the soil. Yet it is completely faithful to the original. There are only two material divergences. Paris does not die on the stage; perhaps the producers think that he is not even worth the killing. And the balcony scene takes place in an orchard, evidently because a garden lends itself to dancing better than a balcony.

We have just come back after seeing Ulanova again as Juliet. I could not believe that she was 42 years old. Not that she looked 14, Juliet's age; the years are beginning to leave a mark even on Ulanova. But age has not withered, nor custom staled, the

infinite variety of her movements Her face, too, is capable of expressing an infinite variety of emotions And what emotions! Girlish gaiety, the dawn of love, the presentiment of doom, the growth, ecstasy, abandon and anguish of love and the haunting fear of death which closed in on her temporarily, when she took Friar Laurence's potion, and released her from its grip for a few moments, only to show her a death even more terrible than her own, the death of her lover Ulanova not merely danced the acts and scenes in the play, she danced the very lines of Shakespeare I have heard many an eminent actress, reciting such beautiful lines as

It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear,
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

But no one has squeezed the last ounce of sweetness out of these lines so well as Ulanova did by her mute and mobile eloquence

The ballet which I saw last night was very different from what I had imagined a ballet to be I used to think that a ballet was all dancing and no acting, but here was an acting dance, a dancing drama. It was the antithesis of the style, which was praised by Beretta, the Italian dancer, who said that in a ballet drama was just nonsense and that technique was the only thing worth cultivating I am told that before the Revolution there used to be two rival schools of dancing, the Leningrad school and the Moscow school The Leningrad school specialized in style and ignored expression, while the Moscow school paid as much attention to expression as to technique Ulanova has resolved this conflict, in her dancing the dramatic and the choreographic elements are perfectly blended

The ballet was by no means a one man or one woman show The mass scenes reflected the tumult the brilliance and the decadence of the dying Middle Ages, into which the Renaissance was breaking Every character in the ballet suited the part to perfection Romeo was eclipsed by Juliet even as Dushanta is eclipsed by Shakuntala in Kalidasa's immortal drama In Shakespeare, as in Kalidasa, the female of the species is lovelier (and, as in *Macbeth*, deadlier) than the male I have never seen a more mercurial Mercutio than Koren, who took that part,

and the scene of his death, which Shakespeare so heartlessly brought about, was unbearable. True to Shakespeare he lingered so long over his death that Anujee exclaimed: 'Why doesn't he die?'

Before I went to *Romeo and Juliet*, I wondered whether there would be any attempt to give an ideological twist to this play. I was told that in the early days of the Revolution there was some hesitation to show *Romeo and Juliet* because the scenes in which the servants of Montague and Capulet fought betrayed a lack of solidarity in the ranks of the proletariat. Ford, the Canadian Chargé d'Affaires, told me that he asked the representative of one of the Eastern Democracies what he thought of this ballet. That gentleman hesitated for a few seconds and said: 'It shows how different is pure love from the degraded love of the bourgeoisie.' What he meant he alone knows. The ballet in the Bolshoi theatre was not afraid to conform to Shakespeare's play in every detail. Russia's Friar Laurence was as authentic a monk as has ever appeared on a Roman Catholic stage; and godless Russia had no hesitation to show the Virgin and the Child and the intense adoration which those images evoked from mortal men in the crises of their lives.

The music in *Romeo and Juliet* is by Prokofiev, one of the greatest Russian composers after the Revolution. Prokofiev knew how to compose, but he did not know when to die. His death on the 4th of March proved inconvenient to the Government and the Party and was not announced until a week later, lest it should distract attention from a greater death which occurred the next day, the death of Stalin. Prokofiev spent many years in exile after the Revolution, but returned to Russia in 1934, saying that 'Foreign air does not suit my inspiration, because I am a Russian, that is to say, the least suited of men to be an exile'. But there was a time when Russian air, too, did not suit him. In 1948, at a conference of Soviet musicians, Zhdanov denounced the works of the three great Soviet composers, Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Khachaturian as 'anti-people', 'divorced from reality' and 'marked by formalist perversions'. The reputation of these composers, said Zhdanov, had been built up by 'a clique of sycophantic critics and racketeers'. Prokofiev acknowledged his lapses and, in the hope of atoning for his sins, wrote an opera, *The Story of a Real Man* and the *Ode to Stalin*.

Even this did not satisfy his critics. They condemned *The Story of a Real Man* as 'modernist' and 'lacking in the understanding of Soviet heroism and humanity' and his *Ode to Stalin* as 'atonal'. Even his Sixth Symphony was pronounced 'formalistic'. But after Stalin's death music has been showing some signs of regaining freedom, and Khachaturian has launched a vehement attack on the vagaries of censorship.

YASNAYA POLYANA

YASNAYA POLYANA is a pleasant spot for a picnic from Moscow. To us it was more than a picnic, it was a pilgrimage. Tolstoy's name is held in reverence throughout India, not merely because of his writings, but because he was one of the great formative influences, next only to the *Gita* and the Sermon on the Mount, on Mahatma Gandhi. I was glad to have been able to go to Yasnaya Polyana in the company of Gandhi's favourite disciple, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.

Tolstoy's house is situated in a lovely undulating park, some 40 hectares in extent. It is a simple unpretentious building, fully in keeping with his philosophy of life. It was small by Tsarist standards, for Tolstoy came from aristocratic stock, his father having been a Count and his mother a Princess. His house is preserved exactly as it used to be in his lifetime. In his bedroom we saw pictures of his family, which consisted of thirteen children, five of whom died in infancy, his old cot, the crutch which he had to use after he had injured his leg, and the slop-basin which he himself insisted on emptying and cleaning. Tolstoy, like Gandhi, believed in the dignity of manual labour and expected the members of his family, sometimes to their annoyance, to use their hands more and their servants less. His small bedroom was a striking contrast to his wife's. Hers was larger, more ornate and full of icons and pictures.

A balcony in front of Tolstoy's study overlooked a garden, which he himself used to tend, and a forest where he used to play as a child, hunt as a nobleman and meditate as a thinker. From that balcony he could also see the village, where he used to spend



Anujee with Ulanova (on her right) and Lepeshinskaya

many hours, helping and chatting and cracking jokes with the villagers. On the ground floor he had set apart a room to receive the peasants; his wife could not bear to have them on the first floor. In fact, his solicitude for, and his intimacy with, the peasants was one cause of the friction which developed between him and his family in later years.

We were happy to be in Tolstoy's study where he wrote some of his famous novels such as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* and corresponded with kindred spirits, including Mahatma Gandhi. There we saw the hard-bottomed sofa on which he was born, a phonograph which was presented to him by Edison, a picture of Dickens which he had brought from England and the woodwork presented to him by the peasants whom he loved. There was also his writing desk, on which was his scrap book, made up from odd bits of paper which others would have thrown into the wastepaper basket. Rajkumariji said that Gandhiji, too, could not bear to throw away any bit of paper which could be used and, like Tolstoy, kept a scrap book. The most touching sight of all was the candle on the writing desk which he blew out for the last time on the night of 10 November 1910 when he decided to renounce his home and family and go out and live a simple life. That night he wrote a letter to his wife, explaining his decision, thanking her for the life they had lived together, and apologizing to her for any lack of consideration on his part. One soul, his wife's, remained strange to this man who had plumbed the depths of the human heart in his imperishable novels.

Around Tolstoy's house is an extensive garden where he planted apple and cherry trees and grew all kinds of flowers. He loved gardening and insisted that the members of his family should share this pleasure which, to many of them, was mere labour. In one corner of the house, Bulgakov, who had been his secretary in the last years of his life, showed us a pond where Tolstoy's wife, on learning of his flight from home, attempted to drown herself and Bulgakov had to plunge in and save her. In another part of the compound we saw his stable and a small dispensary which his favourite daughter, Tatyana, had built for the peasants after her father's death. Tatyana was the only child who fully shared her father's ideals. In 1930, when Gandhiji passed through Rome on his way back to India after the Round

Table Conference in London, Tatyana was gracious enough to go and see him

The garden around Tolstoy's home merges almost imperceptibly into the forest. There are some lovely oak trees here, and it is said that under a clump of these trees Tolstoy's wife, Sofia Alexandryevna, and her small son once sought shelter during a thunderstorm—an incident described in *War and Peace*. In the heart of the forest is Tolstoy's grave. It is simplicity itself. The simplest tomb I had visited so far was that of the Emperor Aurangzeb near Ellora. That puritan Emperor had given instructions that nothing more should be spent on his tomb than the price which could be fetched from the sale of the cloth caps which he himself had sewn during his lifetime. Unlike the magnificent tombs of his ancestors, Akbar and Shahjahan, Aurangzeb's tomb is marked by a single slab of marble. Tolstoy's grave is even simpler. It is just a mound of earth, covered with flowers under a canopy of white birch trees. Tolstoy himself had marked this spot for his grave. It is said that it was here that he and his brother, Nikolai, used to play as children and hunt for a magical green stick, the possessor of which would have the capacity of making all beings happy. And now this has become a magic spot, giving comfort and inspiration to war-weary humanity through that doctrine of non-violence which the man who lies here preached and which was adopted by one as great as himself and used for the liberation of one fifth of mankind.

Standing in front of Tolstoy's grave, I thought of the strange last journey of this man. On 10 November 1910 Tolstoy, at the age of 82, suddenly decided to renounce his home and go out into the world. Accompanied by his daughter Tatyana and his doctor, he left his house in the middle of the night. The next day he reached the monastery of Optina and spent the night there writing an article, 'The Pains of Death'. On the 12th he reached the Convent of Chermudino where his sister, Marie, had been staying as a nun. He told his sister that he would like to live in that Convent, performing the most menial tasks, provided that no pressure would be used on him to enter the church. His visit, however, could not be kept secret, and his sister warned him two days later that the authorities, civil as well as ecclesiastical were on his track. He therefore left the Convent and went to Astopovo, a small railway station. There he caught pneumonia

The news spread like wild-fire; and doctors came from Moscow. Priests came, too; and Father Karsonoft, the Abbot of Optina, demanded admission to the dying man's presence, saying that he had been instructed by the Holy Synod to take Tolstoy back into the Church. The Synod, which had excommunicated Tolstoy a few years earlier for his uncompromising opposition to institutional religion, now wanted to capture his soul for the Church. His daughter, however, mounted guard over him and prevented any priests from approaching him. There, in the house of the humble station-master of Astopovo, Tolstoy passed away at 6 a.m. on 20 November 1910.

A few yards from his grave lies his favourite horse, which survived him by two years.

CHRISTMAS IN RUSSIA

THIS year New Year was celebrated with greater enthusiasm than before and the Yotka in the Hall of Columns attracted large crowds. *Yotka* is the Russian word for a fir tree. In this festive season it has a special meaning. It corresponds to the Christmas tree, which is universal in Christendom, but is known as the New Year tree here.

The Kremlin, until this year the mysterious abode of Stalin, was thrown open for the first time to children. To adults, too; and the new year was inaugurated by a gala fancy dress ball in which Malenkov, Voroshilov and other dignitaries of the Party and the Government took part. At 12 noon on the 1st of January, thousands of children assembled in the Georgievsky Hall of the Kremlin. Every child was given a present and then shown round the historic sights in the Kremlin such as the Vladimir Hall, the Granovitaya Palace and the Uspensky and Blagoveshchensky Cathedrals. Nowadays Russian children are taught to regard the imperial past of Russia with pride and not, as in the early days of communism, as a nightmare from which communism rescued the people. Indeed, while describing the New Year ceremonies in the Kremlin, *Pravda* called it 'the Holy of Holies of our people'.

We ourselves saw the New Year celebrations in the Hall of Columns. It was in this stately building that, some ten months ago, Stalin lay in state and thousands of mourners marched past. The Hall now wore a festive appearance. Here, as in the Kremlin, there was a huge concourse of children. Almost the only adults were Anujee and myself. Russian parents who took their children had to stay behind, leaving the children to themselves in the main room in the Hall of Columns. Thanks to Valia's resourcefulness, we both were admitted into that room and given a place of honour. We took with us two children from the Embassy, Vijaya and Mohini. There were songs, dances, games and acrobatic feats. There were a number of animals too. The favourite animal was the teddy bear. The great moment was the arrival of Santa Claus or, as he is known in Russia, Grandfather Frost. Then the *yolka* hove into view, decorated with flags, illuminated by multicoloured bulbs and laden with presents. On seeing the *yolka* so brilliantly lit, the children involuntarily advanced towards it, but at a gesture from the Master of Ceremonies, withdrew. This happened again, and the advancing and retreating tide of children was a goodly spectacle to watch. Vijaya and Mohini left us and joined the children's games. They were the heroines of the morning for as foreigners they attracted a great deal of attention. They were passed from hand to hand and had the honour of being photographed with Santa Claus himself.

Thus the new year is being celebrated in Russia with all the traditional ceremonies appropriate for Christmas. Officially, however, Christmas stands abolished. It was banned as a day of rest by a decree which was issued in 1929. In order to make the decree effective, Christmas Day was proclaimed as 'a day of industrialization' in urban areas and as 'a day of Socialist culture' in rural areas. The sale of Christmas trees was prohibited. The custom of lopping off branches from fir trees was denounced on the ground that it was wasteful of the arboreal wealth of the nation. In particular, Santa Claus was denounced as a reactionary, behind whom hid those enemies of the people, the priest and the kulak. Now Santa Claus has returned as Grandfather Frost. The Christmas tree, too, has come back, disguised as New Year tree.

Christianity has receded in the Soviet Union but Christmas has survived.

A RUSSIAN PLAY

IT was long after our arrival in Moscow before we saw a Russian play. We had been hesitating to go to one as our knowledge of Russian was so meagre. We have of course seen dozens of ballets and operas. To see a ballet or an opera is one thing; to see a play, another. The language of the opera is universal—it is the language of music—and the ballet has no language at all; but the virtue of a play depends as much on the language as on the acting.

The play was called *Gde Eta Ulitsa? Gde Etot Dom?* (Where is the Street? Where is the House?). It was staged in the Satire Theatre and was essentially a satire on contemporary customs and manners. The hero, one Berezkin, is a chauffeur who has won the Certificate of Merit for driving his truck for 100,000 kilometres without having overhauled it once—a skit on the way certificates of merit are sometimes awarded in the Soviet Union. Newly engaged, he goes in search of a new flat and fails to find one. This gives the actors an opportunity for drawing piquant attention to the acute shortage of housing in the Soviet Union and the desperate efforts which are being made to improve it. Berezkin goes to inspect a flat and finds the inmate telephoning, with a blanket round his head. That was the only way in which he could telephone without being overheard by his neighbours. Occasionally he gets excited in the course of his conversation and flings the blanket aside. Then his more inquisitive neighbours begin to eavesdrop and the more irate ones protest against his speaking so loudly. After the telephone conversation there is a few minutes' silence. Then the occupant of the flat, who is anxious to let it, proceeds to explain its virtues to Berezkin. Suddenly human voices begin to be heard from the right and the left, from the top and the bottom; so thin are the partitions between the flats and so flimsy is the construction of the floor and the ceiling.

Berezkin then goes to another flat and is received with effusive kindness by two old ladies who mistake him for a would-be son-in-law whom they had been expecting. They entertain him with vodka and caviare and are all attention to him. When,

however, they realize their mistake they abuse him as an impostor and show themselves to be the true viragos that they are

But the play is more than a comedy of manners. It is also a satire on some of the maxims held sacred in communist theory. One such maxim is 'criticism and self-criticism'. Every communist is expected to apply the canon of criticism to himself. Every factory, every collective farm, every party cell is also expected to apply criticism and self-criticism to all its activities. The play begins with an exercise in criticism and self-criticism on the part of the officials of the theatre. But whom are they to criticize? The management? But the management is altogether too influential a body and may contain some members related to the Ministers. So it is not safe to criticize the management. The writer of the play? But the writer is a member of the Union of Writers, a powerful body which can kill a play even before it has seen the light of day. The actors? But criticism may have a damping effect on their acting. Thus it is not expedient to criticize the management, the writer, or the actors. But, as good communists, they must criticize someone. After a great deal of discussion, they decide to criticize the courier who brings in a letter. The implication is that this is the way in which the vaunted principle of criticism and self-criticism works in Soviet society.

Another injunction of the Communist Party and its willing collaborator, the Writers' Union, is that Soviet authors should always depict a 'conflict', conflict between the higher and the lower, the communist and the bourgeois, elements in society. The Soviet Union is still surrounded by enemies who have their agents even within the country. Moreover, it is always possible for a communist to relapse into bourgeois habits of thought. It is therefore the primary duty of communist writers to deal with the ever-present conflict between the new and the old order of things. Some Soviet writers are apt to think that Russian society has reached a stage of perfection and that they can afford to paint it in rosy colours. This attitude is called 'The No-Conflict Theory'—a heresy, based on a thoughtless complacency which it is a sin on the part of a true communist to cherish. And in Stalin's time it was more than a sin, it was an offence.

This theory came in for delightful satire in the play *Gde Eta Ulitsa? Gde Etot Dom?* Berezkin, still in search of a flat, visits

an apartment which is occupied by a couple of literary hacks. They had been spending sleepless nights and days, thinking out a play to be based on 'conflict', and unable to find a suitable theme. Then Berezkin comes in. He inquires about the measurements and amenities of the flat. The two authors, however, are more interested in him than in his questions and pry into his history. Berezkin merely says that he has just got engaged to a girl and that he wants to move into a more suitable apartment. 'There!' exclaim the two writers, 'There is a conflict raging in his mind! A conflict between his love for his fiancée and his fear that he might lose her. A conflict between his triumph in securing her love and his humiliation in not securing a flat.' Berezkin swears that there is no such conflict in his mind. Nevertheless the authors are determined to construct a whole story, based on the conflict in Berezkin's mind, and fall into a trance. The next scene is a fantasy. It shows a dream which comes to the two writers; and we are treated to an opera, an operetta and a revue, all revolving round a mental conflict.

The implication is that this is the way writers in the Soviet Union are compelled to use the theme of conflict to produce books. One need only add that if anyone had dared to question the theory of conflict or to stage such a play in Stalin's time, he would have done so at his peril.

Another play which is in vogue at present is called *It's No Sin to Laugh*. A grim-looking individual, with bushy eyebrows and a permanent frown, climbs to the stage from the audience and takes the actors to task for their levity. 'We have tremendous accomplishments to our credit,' he says: 'how dare you laugh?' 'But it is not the accomplishments we are laughing at; we are making fun of the shortcomings,' plead the actors. 'So much the worse for you!' he replies, 'To think that there are any shortcomings in the Soviet Union or that there can be anything funny in them!'

The Soviet people are beginning to have the courage and the capacity to laugh occasionally at their rulers and at themselves. And that is a healthy sign.

OBLOMOVISM

I HAVE been reading a delightful book, *Oblomov*, written by Ivan Goncharov in the middle of the last century. It has become a classic in Russian literature and has contributed a new word to the dictionary. Oblomovism has come to stand for the mental state of a man who is utterly and incorrigibly lethargic, who is well meaning, good natured and kind hearted, but has no will of his own and lets all his faculties rust until he fades away, as Oblomov did in middle age, like a clock that stops because it has not been wound up.

The interest of the book lies in the fact that Oblomov is more than a study of one man or one type. It is also the study of a society which tended to produce that type. Having read *Oblomov* I can appreciate why the entire apparatus of the Soviet State is being used to create the opposite type, 'the new Soviet man'—vital, dynamic and purposeful.

Oblomov's birth and upbringing were largely responsible for his arrested development. He was born on an estate, owned by his father and worked by some four hundred serfs from Central Asia. Peace reigned on the estate, and the outer world never intruded into it. Nature itself fostered his growth simply as a vegetable. On that estate the sky seemed to come closer to the earth than elsewhere, the hills were but hillocks and the rivers were smiling rivulets. There the moon was a moon and nothing more, no poet gazed at it with ecstatic eyes, if he did, the moon would merely look at him as innocently as a village beauty in response to the ardent glances of an urban Don Juan. There the seasons followed one another with monotonous regularity. No calamities ever occurred, 'the Lord never visited those parts with either the Egyptian or any other plague'. In the people's houses, too, unruffled peace and quiet prevailed. Food was their foremost care and their principal subject of conversation. The only excitements were births, marriages and deaths. At the end of the day, each man went to bed, thanking the Lord for having enabled him to pass so peaceful a day and praying that the next day might be exactly the same.

In such a society Oblomov began life by not knowing how to

put on his stockings and ended it by not knowing how to live. Yet he had generous impulses. He was not callous to human suffering. Sometimes, as a young man, he would weep bitterly in the depths of his heart over the sorrows of mankind. He even had vague yearnings to relieve the miseries of his fellow men. But he did not see the world, as the Soviet man is expected to do, in terms of black and white, good and evil, the oppressors and the oppressed. There is an interesting account of a conversation between him and an author who visited him. Authors in those days were strange fellows of whom the common man knew nothing. 'What are these authors?' asks the porter of Oblomov's estate, 'Are they special officials or something?' 'No,' replies Zahar, Oblomov's valet, 'they are gentlemen who lounge about on sofas, drink sherry and smoke pipes. Sometimes they make a fearful mess on the floor with their feet.'

The author who visited Oblomov expounds his views on literature in words which today the Communist Party would doubtless approve. 'The function of a writer', he says, 'is bitter denunciation of vice, burning malice, contemptuous laughter at fallen humanity.' 'No,' replies Oblomov. 'That is not everything! Depict a thief, a fallen woman, a stuck-up fool, but don't forget they are human beings. Where is your human feeling? You think you can write from the head only. You imagine thought does not need the heart? . . . Stretch a helping hand to the fallen man or weep over him, but don't jeer! Love him, try to see yourself in him, and heal him as you would yourself—then I will read you and bow down before you. You describe a thief or a fallen woman, but forget to bring out the human being in them or perhaps don't know how to do it. What art, what poetry do you see in that? Denounce depravity and filth, only please don't pretend to be poets.'¹ Here one hears Oblomovism raising its voice against Zhdanovism which was still in the womb of time.

Despite Oblomov's sympathy for his fellow men, he is unable to be of any service to them. He cannot even help himself. The few years he spent in the Civil Service did not develop his character. He worked under a chief 'who never failed to encourage one; he did not forget even those who did nothing. Those who had served long enough he recommended for

¹ This and the following quotations are taken from Natalie Duddington's translation (Everyman's Library).

promotion, and those who had not, for a bonus or Order of Merit. Occasionally Oblomov had to do a little noting and drafting, but these bored him stiff. 'At this rate,' he asked himself, 'when am I to live?' The crisis came when he sent off to Astrakhan a telegram meant for Archangel. An inquiry was set on foot as to who was responsible, and Oblomov, not daring to face it, produced a medical certificate and resigned from the service. That was the end of his official career.

Goncharov's description of the civil service in Tsarist times was based on first-hand knowledge, for he himself had been in it and had held various appointments such as Secretary to the Ministry of Finance. Evidently it was not very different from a District office in British India which was described by my first Collector, J. C. Molony, as 'a multitude of tails which, sometimes singly, and sometimes collectively, wag a feebly resisting head'. In every office there was a vast collection of instructions, references and protocols. These, however, alarmed no one, for 'if you have a good secretary you need not trouble, all you have to do is to sign your name'.

Even signing his name was too much trouble for Oblomov. After he resigned from the civil service, he spent most of his life in bed. To get out of bed was a ritual and an ordeal for him, and one of the most trying duties of his servant, Zahar, was to wake him up despite his groanings, grumblings, abuses, renewed snores, sittings up and lyings-down again. Zahar suited his master perfectly. He woke him up, dressed him in the morning and undressed him in the evening, and spent the rest of the day doing nothing and caring nothing for the bugs and cockroaches which crawled about and the dust and dirt which had accumulated on the furniture in Oblomov's rooms. In his own way Zahar was devoted to Oblomov. He could not think of any other existence than that in which he dressed his master, fed him, imposed upon him, growled at him and inwardly revered him. In the last chapter of the book this comic character takes on a tragic guise. Oblomov is dead and Zahar is turned out of the house. Reduced to penury and drunkenness, he roams about in rags, begging for his daily bread, visiting his master's grave every day and muttering to himself: 'To think that the Lord should have taken such a man from us! He was a joy to all, he ought to have lived a hundred years. I've been to his grave today.'

whenever I come to these parts I go there; I sit down and cry and cry. Sometimes I lose myself thinking, it is so still around, and suddenly I fancy he is calling me, "Zahar, Zahar" and a shudder runs down my back! We shall never have another such master.'

Oblomov had no use for those masterful men who always looked as though they wanted to saddle human beings and ride on their backs. After all, what did all human efforts amount to? 'One desired a thing yesterday, and desperately, passionately longs for it today, but the day after tomorrow he will blush for having desired it and then curse life, whether the desire had, or had not, been fulfilled.' As for himself, he would prefer to live under a placid sky, never lit by the lightnings of great joys or resounding with the thunder of great sorrows. That was his conception of a happy life; and at the age of 30 we see him, enervated by his soft and listless life, 'the soft down on his chin, turned into stiff bristles, his shining eyes dimmed, his waist broadened, his hair coming out cruelly. He was turned 30; he had not advanced a step in any direction and was still standing on the threshold of his life exactly as he did ten years before.'

Occasionally Oblomov thought of the problems of life, but 'they whirled through his mind, like frightened birds, roused suddenly by a ray of sunlight in a slumbering ruin'. Shunning the world, Oblomov became afraid of the world. He felt stifled in a crowd; stepped into a boat, feeling uncertain of reaching the other bank; drove in a carriage, expecting the horses to bolt and the carriage to crash. Once he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and his friends and doctors advised him to go abroad. 'But, who ever goes to America or Egypt?' asked Oblomov. 'The English do, but that is the way God made them; besides they have no room to live at home.'

Yet, every now and then, Oblomov realizes the inanity of his life. Why is it, he asks himself, that his life is not like the life of others? Theirs, like the morning, gradually acquires colour and turns into a blazing day, when everything is seething with movement in the vivid noon-day light, and then gradually subsides and grows dimmer, until it fades naturally into the evening twilight. 'No,' cries Oblomov. 'My life began by fading out.'

Yet for a few weeks it looked as if even his life might blossom out into something rich and beautiful. Thanks to an old classmate

of his—a German, Stolz, who, with his restless energy, is a perfect foil to him—Oblomov meets a spirited girl, Olga, and falls in love with her and she returns his love. But even love is too strenuous for him, he lacks the energy and self-confidence to pursue it. He is perpetually tormented by the thought that he is unworthy of her. Does Olga really love him? How can she? Did she not see him yawning the other day and did she not suppress a secret smile when he shut his mouth instantly with a snap? How could he, a nincompoop, prevent her from falling in love with some *he man* like Stolz? Eventually, Olga gives him up in despair. 'I had thought,' she tells him, 'that I could revive you, that you could still live for my sake, but you died long ago. You are gentle, you are honourable, you are tender like a dove, you hide your head under your wing, you are ready to spend all your life cooing under a roof.' Eventually, Stolz marries Olga, and Oblomov receives the news, not with dismay or disappointment, but with relief that she has found someone more worthy of her. Oblomov himself drifts involuntarily into a marriage with his old, divorced and illiterate landlady, who ministers to his animal comforts and looks after him as a hen looks after her chicken.

Before Olga leaves him, she tenderly asks 'Who left a curse on you, Ilya Oblomov? What have you done? You are kind, intelligent, affectionate, noble and you are doomed. What has ruined you? There is no name for that evil.' 'Yes, there is' whispered Oblomov, almost inaudibly. She looked at him inquiringly with her eyes full of tears. 'Oblomovism' he whispered.

There is no room for Oblomovism in Soviet Russia.

A RUSSIAN HOSPITAL

AT the end of February 1958 I went into hospital with a severe attack of influenza, hoping to come out within a week. Actually, I had to stay there for a month as my influenza developed into pneumonia. It was a peculiar kind of pneumonia there was hardly any temperature and there were no aches and pains of any kind. Yet it lingered for many weeks and has left a scar in my right lung which, I am told, will be a life long companion.

I was accommodated in the Fifth Block of the Bodkin Hospital. This block, which has about 20 rooms, each with two beds, is reserved for foreigners and especially for diplomats. Among my fellow-patients were a couple of Afghans, a Chinese, a Ceylonese, an Indonesian, a Korean, a Pole, an Albanian, a Yugoslav and a Rumanian. There was no one from any Embassy belonging to NATO, MEDO or SEATO. Not that the personnel of these Embassies are more immune from human ailments or more acclimatized to Moscow than others; but whenever they fall ill, they prefer to avail themselves of the services of the doctors attached to the British and American Embassies, and if their illness is at all serious they are flown off to Berlin or Stockholm. Evidently, the Westerners' lack of faith in Russian politics also extends to Russian medicine.

It is perhaps natural that Englishmen and Americans should prefer to get treated by doctors of their own nationality. In the British days, Englishmen in India, and especially Englishwomen, generally insisted on the right to be treated by English doctors; that was one of the reasons originally urged against the Indianization of the IMS. Moreover, British prestige was involved. I recall a curious incident which occurred more than 30 years ago when I entered the ICS. A senior British ICS officer's daughter had been expecting a child and desired to be attended by Dr Rangachary, a famous surgeon whose statue stands in front of the General Hospital, Madras. Her parents tried their best to dissuade her but she was adamant. The result was that her unfortunate father, who permitted a 'native' to attend on his daughter at the time of her delivery, was almost boycotted by his people and—so it was said—lost his chance of becoming a Member of the Governor's Executive Council.

The Bodkin Hospital consists of 27 blocks and can accommodate 2,200 patients. To judge by Block No. V, the hospital is liberally staffed. The staff consists mostly of women. In Block No. V, the doctors-in-charge were Galina Ilinichna Kozlova and Nina Govrilova. Dr Kozlova is a highly skilled doctor, who goes about with a perpetually worried look; I suspect she worries too much over the state of her patients. She has the kindest of eyes, so reassuring to a person who is ill. Dr Govrilova is younger and more energetic. She is one of the few thin women I have come across in Russia and has almost the figure of a ballerina.

No man has ever been treated by doctors abler or more kind-hearted than these two women

The nurses were of course all women. In the Soviet Union there are no male nurses as in India. The Bodkin nurses were all in, or just out of, their teens and appear to have been selected, or at least posted to this ward, as much for their good looks as for their efficiency. One of them was a novice. Whenever she injected penicillin into me—and, to start with, this was done four times a day—I felt that she was plugging a hole into me. The other three were more gentle. One complimented me on the state of my buttocks: she said that I must have been an athlete, for the needle would not go easily into me. Another was less complimentary: she said it was always difficult to inoculate southerners like Indians and Africans, meaning that our hide was pretty thick. My own favourite was Valia who combined good looks, good nature and an affectionate disposition. A rare combination in a nurse, which might soothe or disturb a patient, according to his temperament, during his convalescence!

Each nurse was assisted by an elderly female who made the beds and kept the rooms clean. They had a passion for cleanliness. Twice a day, and sometimes more often, these hefty women, armed with vacuum cleaners, brooms and buckets, would barge into your room, no matter whether you were sleeping or not, and start cleaning. These women were old enough to be the mothers of the nurses. Evidently they are too old to be trained and are therefore employed in menial occupations which require no special training or intelligence. I felt somewhat sorry for them as it was their duty to clean the latrines and WCs. These had to be cleaned very often as the flush was always leaking. When we were in hospital in August last, we found the flush leaking, it was leaking still! The flush in our Embassy, too, is always going out of order. It is strange that a State which was the first to invent the sputnik has not devised a satisfactory flush. This reflects the exact relationship between heavy industry and consumer goods in the Soviet Union.

While the doctors were all women, the professors were all men. Between a doctor and a professor there is the same difference as between a Tutor and a Fellow at Oxford. A number of professors examined me—Levin, Reinburg, Shereshevsky, Savitsky and Vachell. Each of them is an authority in his own field and

would be an ornament to the medical profession in any country in the world.

I also had the honour of being examined by an Academician. In the USSR, an Academician is regarded with the highest respect; he stands far higher than even a Professor; his standing can only be compared to that of a Fellow of All Souls. Academician Vovci was the Chairman of a Board which was constituted to deal with my case. The name, Vovci, roused a sinister echo in my mind. He was one of those Jewish 'doctor-murderers' who, in January 1953, were charged by Stalin for having medically murdered senior members of the Party, the Government and the Army. Vovci and his co-accused would assuredly have been shot if Stalin had not died. It is 'strange that one man's life should have been dependent on another man's death. But Vovci has saved as many lives as Stalin has destroyed.

A number of specialists were also called in to examine me—specialists in dermatology, diseases of the kidney, of the ear, nose and throat, and a physical instructor. The physical instructor, a magnificent woman, was a picture of physical culture. She taught me the art of deep breathing. When she breathed in, her breasts would rise challengingly towards you, but when she breathed out, they would withdraw like an army in retreat. The kidney expert inserted his giant finger into a delicate part where, in spite of my sojourn in the North-West Frontier Province, no foreign body had ever penetrated. The Ear, Nose and Throat physician was a humorist; he came in jauntily saying: 'Ear, Nose, Throat! Ear, Nose, Throat! I can repair them all.' He was disappointed to find that mine did not need repair. The only grumpy individual whom I met was the tongue expert. I had somehow bitten my tongue and this formed a boil. The expert came in, had a look at the boil, asked me whether it was paining, said, 'Wash with soda,' and walked out without so much as a '*Do svidaniya*' (Good-bye). Perhaps he was irritated that he, an eminent specialist, should have been called in for such a minor ailment. Or perhaps he was contemptuous that a grown-up man should have bitten his tongue!

Looking back on the weeks I spent in the hospital, I feel that after all my stay was not too tiresome. In some ways, I may even be said to have enjoyed it. It was a refreshing change to be in Moscow with no engagement book, no telephone calls,

hardly any visitors, and no receptions and banquets. How many National Day receptions I escaped! Among them were the National Days of Denmark, Iceland, Pakistan, Greece, Cambodia and Hungary. Anujee dutifully attended them all. And almost every day she would come to the hospital with some gossip about the Embassy, some courier who got entangled with a Polish girl in Warsaw, some news from the outer world, some letter from the children, and always with a jar of freshly made chicken soup to supplement the wholesome but monotonous diet in the hospital.

To be in hospital is rather like being in a ship. In fact, Block No. V resembled a ship. It consisted of a long line of rooms with an open space behind and a veranda in front. The veranda opened out into three rooms, corresponding to the bar, the smoking room and the bridge room in a ship. In these rooms, patients, most of whom seemed convalescing rather than ailing, would gather together and spend their time talking to each other, reading, or watching the television. As in a ship, each had his favourite chair, and if anyone else usurped it, he felt irritated. I was generally left undisturbed in my own corner facing the garden.

The patients formed a motley crowd. There was young Habib, an Afghan boy of 12, a veritable Adonis. There was an elder Afghan of 21 who had undergone operation after operation, of which he loved giving the most vivid details. His latest operation lasted four hours and fifty minutes. There was an Albanian who would ask me the most minute questions about my illness, not so much because he was concerned over my health but because he wanted to know how far my symptoms tallied with his own. There was Pillai, my Private Secretary, who, with touching loyalty, synchronized his illness with mine so as to be with me even in hospital. There was a Chinese woman, who moved about with an air of bravado and yet was a coward. She was taken to, and brought back from, the operation ward four times, because of the hell she raised by her weeping and shrieking. And above all, there was Hashim, the Sudanese Secretary, well-read and insatiable in his thirst for knowledge, who would suddenly appear before me and ask me what I thought of life after death and democracy and dictatorship and materialism and mysticism. 'Don't you think,' he asked me once, 'that in this country materialism is a form of mysticism?' A hospital, like a ship, forges a bond

between persons which is more lasting than the casual friendships formed in a hotel or a club.

While in hospital, I heard of the result of the elections to the Supreme Soviet and Khrushchev's appointment as Prime Minister. On the latter event, which provoked headlines and leading articles in all the newspapers in the West, there was little comment in Moscow. But the Soviet organs of publicity spoke day after day regarding the tremendous significance of the elections which took place on 16 March. It was announced that 99.97 per cent had taken part in the elections and that 99.6 per cent had voted for the official candidates. Why anyone should have taken the trouble to go to the polling booth at all when there was only one candidate to vote for is something beyond my comprehension. He must have felt that he was doing his duty as a Soviet citizen; and in this country Duty is, to parody Wordsworth, 'the stern daughter of the voice of the Party'. One day, one of the old women in the hospital, after sweeping my room, said that she was going off to the polling booth to vote. 'For whom?' I asked. She did not know; it was rather a difficult name, she said. For that matter, Mr Gluck, the American Ambassador designate to Ceylon, did not know the name of Ceylon's Prime Minister!

During my illness my most constant companion was the miniature radio which hung just above my pillow. The Moscow radio does indeed provide a nourishing diet to its listeners. A physical instructor wakes you up at 6.30 a.m. to the accompaniment of music and directs you to take different kinds of exercises. Having braced you up physically, it offers you a stiff intellectual treat, the leading article in *Pravda*. Almost every hour, news is broadcast—news, carefully sterilized so as to confirm your faith in the beauty of communism and the iniquity of capitalism. There is a children's hour both in the morning and in the afternoon. Not only are children listeners but they are performers over the radio. There is, of course, exquisite music, light and heavy, popular and classical, eastern and western, vocal and instrumental. Every now and then, there is a lesson in science and literature; and there are frequent exhortations as to how one should behave in society. One day, I heard a dialogue as to the proper use of the right hand in polite society. When you meet someone, said the radio, you should raise your hat with the right hand, not with the left. It is only with the right hand that you should shake hands;

invalids alone, whose right arm is out of order, may use the left. If the right hand is wet or dirty, do not shake hands at all, simply say, 'Sorry, my hand is dirty' In shaking hands, too much pressure should not be applied, in fact, pressure should be regulated according to the person you shake hands with And always in shaking hands, look into your companion's eyes Thus the Moscow radio strives hard to make a Soviet citizen a better man and a stauncher communist Whether it actually does so or whether its paternalist propaganda drives a man to join the ranks of Nibonichos—a term coined to denote those who care for neither God nor Devil (*ni bog ni chort*)—is a question which I cannot answer

The strangest character I met in the hospital was a barber, who shaved me when I was too ill to move from my bed This was one of the few occasions on which I have allowed myself to be shaved and the first occasion when I was shaved by a woman She burst into my room like a battleship asking, 'Shave or hair cut?' 'Shave,' I said The nurse asked her whether she wanted any hot water 'No,' she replied firmly A towel perhaps asked the nurse 'No, no,' she replied After this double 'No' the nurse retreated, leaving me to the barber's tender mercies She sharpened the razor, even as Shylock sharpened his knife in the court room in Venice, and started operations 'Have you a wife?' she suddenly asked me 'Yes,' I replied 'Does she come and see you in the hospital?' she asked 'Yes, every afternoon,' I replied 'Don't tell her that I have been here!' she said with a sardonic grin To return the compliment, I asked her whether she had a husband 'Yes,' she said, 'No! Yes! No! I had one He left me He was a lorry driver He preferred his lorries to me' And as if to spite him, she started pushing the razor furiously, criss-cross, up and down, right and left For one moment I thought the razor would justify its name, cut-throat But to give her her due, I must say I had the cleanest of shaves Her method reminded me of Anatole France's story of a girl who exercised her profession, the oldest in the world, on him At first she was supine and listless but when she came to know that she had a member of the French Academy in her hands she mustered all her resources and set about her business so vigorously that Anatole France had to tell her 'A little less force, my dear, and a little more finesse will be welcome'

GEORGIA

A CITY OF LIGHTS

I ALWAYS think that women look more beautiful by night than by day. So do cities. I have admired the loveliness of many a famous city by night, including the 'big five', London, Paris, Peking, Moscow and New York. But it is the beauty of the lesser cities which has left an abiding impression on my mind. In war-time Chungking, one of our few joys used to be to stand in the evenings on the veranda of our house, situated at the confluence of the Yangtze and Chialing rivers, and to watch the lights coming out one by one, and then hundred by hundred, on the opposite bank. Similarly, from Castlegrove in Simla, we used to watch, across a deep romantic chasm, Chail, the Maharaja of Patiala's summer abode, clothed in light. More lovely were the lighted cities of Buda and Pest on both sides of the Danube, as seen from that delightful spot, Margaret Island. I must now add Tiflis, or more correctly, Tbilisi, to my list of nocturnal beauties.

We arrived in Tbilisi on an afternoon in June 1953 and had an effusively warm reception, as Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister's daughter, was in our party. We were driven up to a lovely house on a hillock from which we had a beautiful view of the city. The view was specially fine at night from our balcony. On both sides of the Kura river lay the city, lit with myriads of lights. Tbilisi looked like a bride decked in all her jewels, ready to receive the bridegroom. I could not take my eyes away from her and remained on the balcony until after midnight. But when I woke in the morning and looked out the city was covered by a haze: the lights had gone, the glory had departed, and Tbilisi looked like

Some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed!

Or, to revert to the bridal metaphor, it looked like a widowed city; and the Kura looked like a stream of tears.

The next day I discovered that it was not I alone who was so deeply affected by this sight. On the balcony next to ours was Indra. She told me that, intoxicated by the view of Tbilisi at night, she could not sleep but stayed awake till three in the morning. 'I do not get drunk on wine,' she said, 'I get drunk on other things.'

TBILISI

TIFLIS is a hybrid name, given by foreigners to the capital of Georgia. The Georgians themselves call it Tbilisi. Tbilisi means the place of hot water and derives its name from the hot sulphur springs in the centre of the city. These were discovered as early as the fourth century. The story goes that a Georgian king while out hunting shot a pheasant which fell into a pool of water and was found boiling. He then discovered that the water of that spring was perennially hot.

Tbilisi is a picturesque town, sprawling on both banks of the Kura, a mountain torrent which has its source in Turkey and runs to the Caspian Sea. It is surrounded by hills, the spurs of the Caucasus. Most of the hills are bare, but now a systematic attempt is being made to plant trees even on the rocky, inhospitable flanks. Tbilisi can already boast of 35 parks. We were shown round a new one, called Vake Park, which is being laid out. It begins as a formal garden in a valley, then crawls up the side of a hill, turns itself into a park and finally descends into a lake on the other side of the hill. On one side of this park a huge stadium, capable of accommodating 150,000 persons, is under construction.

Construction—and reconstruction—seems to be the order of the day in Tbilisi. The old capital is putting on a new garb. Tbilisi has been the capital of Georgia for 1500 years. It was destroyed five times for it lay, like a lascivious plume, in the way of every invader from the East as well as the West. One sees, as in the old North West Frontier Province, ruins of forts and towers on hill-tops from which men used to look out perpetually for the approach of enemies.

In the days of the Tsars Tbilisi was an ordinary provincial capital, with a population of 200,000. It was a town of pure



Young people in Tbilisi

clerks and petty traders. Now it is a flourishing city of half a million. We were shown round the museum, art galleries, theatres, opera house and the Palace of Pioneers. The children gave a delightful variety entertainment in Indira's honour. The change from the Tsarist to Soviet times is shown by the fact that the magnificent building which used, in the time of the Tsars, to be the Viceroy's house is now occupied by the Palace of Pioneers.

Here, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, children receive special attention. One interesting object which we saw was a children's railway. This railway, $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres long, was built in 1935 by children under the supervision of engineers. It has two trains and three stations called Pioneer Station, Joy Station and Sun Station. The entire railway is operated by children; and it was charming to see the solemn dignity of these young folk, working as station superintendents, stationmasters, pointsmen, engine-drivers and guards. This project must be contributing not merely to the amusement of the children but to their polytechnic education.

In Georgia one cannot help being struck by the fact that the people form a distinctive nation. They have a language of their own, which has nothing to do with Russian. Indeed, in appearance the alphabet resembles some of our South Indian languages like Telugu or Malayalam. I am told that Georgia has also a rich literature. Their greatest poet, Rustaveli, lived in the twelfth century. One of the main streets in Tbilisi is named after him; and there are many statues in his honour. In the eye of the public, he figures almost as largely as Lenin and Stalin. Georgian architecture, too, has certain peculiar qualities. We saw it gracefully adapted to the needs of the present time in such buildings as the Palace of Pleasure in Stalin Park, situated on a hillock dominating the city.

In Tbilisi we saw a fine exhibition of Georgian folk dances. There were a number of martial dances, characteristic of a people who have had more than their share of war and strife and who have had to remain for centuries in constant watchfulness against enemies all round. In their demonic vigour these reminded me of the Hunza dances in the Karakoram, where too live a mountain people noted for their rugged vitality. Very different was a dance dating from pre-Christian times, which we saw yesterday. When the curtain lifted, three beautiful women, with arms intertwined and almost merging into one another, were seen slowly

and solemnly revolving in a circle. Then each came forward and performed a dance at once stately and graceful. Finally, they joined again and revolved slowly off the stage. A beautiful exposition, I thought, of the Hindu philosophical doctrine of unity in diversity.

Half an hour's drive from Tbilisi takes one to Mtskheta which used to be the capital of Georgia before the fifth century. There we visited the Cathedral which was of absorbing interest. It was built in the eleventh century on a spot where an earlier Christian church had stood. According to tradition, there was buried in that church an urn containing the robe which Christ was wearing at the time of his crucifixion and for which the Roman soldiers cast lots. This robe is now in the Cathedral and is exhibited to the public from time to time. The Cathedral itself, of which the architecture seemed to be more Norman than Russian or even Georgian, was damaged, destroyed and reconstructed many times in the course of eight centuries. Georgia had attracted the unwelcome attention of the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mongols, Turks and Slavs. The bullet-shots on the walls of the Cathedral and the marks left by the hooves of angry horses on the marble slabs of the graves inside the church formed an eloquent commentary on the turbulent history of Georgia. We noticed that one of the tombs bore an Arabic, as well as a Georgian, inscription. The bishop, a kindly old man who showed us round, told us that it was the tomb of an Indian Queen, a Georgian woman who had been married to an Emperor of India in the sixteenth century, presumably Akbar, and who came home to die. The mention of another incident also reminded me of India. High up on the walls of the church we saw the carving of a hand severed at the elbow. We were told that it was the hand of the architect of the Cathedral, the King of Georgia ordered it to be cut off lest he should build another church of this kind. This reminded me of a similar fate which, for a similar reason, overtook the architect of the peerless Taj Mahal at the command of the Emperor Shahjahan. Only in that case it was not the hand that was cut off, but the eyes that were put out.

STALIN'S HOME

ON the 12th of July, 1953, we drove out to Gori, the birth-place of Stalin, some 90 kilometres from Tbilisi. For the first 50 kilometres we traversed the great Georgian highway, which for decades had been the only connecting link between Georgia and Russia. Our road wound between hills, now rising well above the level of the Kura, now scraping it; and the river itself sometimes contracted into a deep and narrow stream and sometimes spread over the sands, like a shallow man telling silly stories. The mountain air was bracing; it was good to get it into our lungs after breathing, for days, the hot and dust-laden air of Central Asia.

At about the 50th kilometre we left the main highway and took a turn to Gori. We went straight to the house in which Stalin was born in 1879 and spent the first four years of his life; thereafter his parents moved to another house in Gori. This house has two rooms, one of which was occupied by the owner and the other was hired by Djugashvili, Stalin's father. In this room, 12 feet \times 10 feet, Stalin's parents cooked, ate and slept; and it was there that he was born. In 1937, when it was decided to preserve it as a national monument, Stalin's mother was requested to furnish the room exactly as it used to be when Stalin was born. The only furniture it had, and has, is a hard bedstead, a square table and four stools, a samovar, a kerosene oil lamp and a wooden box in which the Djugashvilis put all their earthly belongings.

Stalin's mother, who lived to the ripe old age of 90, died in 1937. Until the end of her life she retained her simplicity, amounting to naivete. In Tbilisi I heard a story, more apt than authentic, about her. A few years before her death, when she was introduced to the President of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia, she told him that she had a request to make. She said that she had a son, Joseph (Stalin), who had been working in Moscow for a long time. He was getting on in years and the climate of Moscow did not suit him. Moreover, Moscow was too cold for her to go and live with him and look after him. Would not the President, she asked, kindly transfer him from Moscow to Tbilisi, which had a mellow climate and where she could spend the remaining years of her life with him?

flowing the atmosphere became cordial. Then there was no need for language. Only there were long pauses between the courses. After the previous course, the shashlik took a whole hour to come, but it was worth waiting for.

I could not help thinking that five hours was too long for a banquet. The trouble is that in Russia even an ordinary meal in a hotel takes a very long time. Half an hour passes before the waiter takes your order, another half an hour before he brings the first course and still another half an hour before he brings the bill at the end. For me to sit or stand in the same posture was very painful. Once, therefore, I asked Sadasivan, my Personal Assistant, to go ahead of me into the restaurant and to order a borsch and liver cutlets. When I went to the restaurant half an hour later, Sadasivan told me that the thing I wanted was not on the menu. I told him that I had seen it on the day's menu. 'No, Sir,' said Sadasivan. 'There are no spleen cutlets today.' For a vegetarian there is no difference between liver and spleen!

No Russian seems to mind the slowness of the service in hotels and restaurants. He is not even philosophical about it, because he does not regard it as anything unusual. Is this lordly disdain of time traceable to the fact that until recently Russia, as well as India, was a peasant society, where man had to wait on nature, wait for the rains to fall, the sun to shine and the snow to melt? Indeed, in Russia, the peasant had to wait for six or seven months before the winter was over and he could start cultivating his land again. What could he do in the meantime except hold his soul in patience, get gloriously drunk on vodka, and meditate on the meaning—or the meaninglessness—of existence? One is reminded of the old story illustrating the difference between various national temperaments. An Englishman, a Frenchman, a German and a Russian decided to write a book on the elephant. The Englishman bought a rifle, took a P & O ticket to India, shot an elephant in Assam and wrote a book, 'How I shot my first elephant.' The Frenchman went casually to the zoo and saw the male and the female elephants at play and wrote a book, 'The elephant and its amours.' The German plunged into research and after five years of study produced a seven volume treatise called 'A short introduction to the study of the elephant.' The Russian got drunk on vodka and after two days of bliss wrote a slim philosophical treatise 'The elephant, does it exist?'

At the Georgian dinner we did not feel the passage of time, because the intervals between the courses were enlivened by songs and dances from some of the most eminent artistes in Georgia. The high-water mark of the evening was reached when our hosts presented Anujee and Indira with lovely Georgian dresses. They retired, together with their hostesses, into the dressing room and reappeared in their Georgian costumes, to the enthusiastic applause of the audience.

At about 1.30 a.m. we took leave of our hosts and went home. We had to be up at 4.30 so as to catch the plane at dawn. We could still have had three hours' sleep, but we had some packing to do. And then we went to our balcony to have one last, long, lingering look at the lights of Tbilisi. The lights were so beautiful that our look lasted very long indeed.

We left Tbilisi at dawn on the 13th. Hardly had we entered the plane when I fell asleep. I woke up an hour later and found myself over a vast stretch of water. I thought I was dreaming, but suddenly knew that we were over the Black Sea, heading towards that lovely sanatorium, Sochi.

A RUSSIAN SANATORIUM

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WHEN I came to Sochi in July, 1953, with Indira, I little expected that before long I would be privileged to spend a whole month here. I have to thank my Russian doctors for this luxury. I placed myself in their hands for an old spinal complaint and, after a series of tests, they recommended a month in a sanatorium. They gave me the choice of Sochi or Pyatigorsk in the Soviet Union or Iokhumovo in Czechoslovakia. As I had already been to Sochi, I was inclined to go to Pyatigorsk, but 'No,' said Valia, 'you should go to Sochi, for I am myself going there in September.' 'September will not do,' I said, 'my wife will not be able to come with me then.' 'That does not matter,' she said firmly, 'I shall be there.'

Valia is a capable interpreter, but is capable of dropping bricks. A few days ago she caused a sensation by announcing that the doctors had said that Nelson, Prakash Kaul's servant, was suffering from yellow fever. She meant jaundice. On another occasion, we took her with us to a hospital in Moscow to see Aruna Asaf Ali who was a patient there. As usual, Valia acted as interpreter. She told us that the doctors were of opinion that though Aruna was distinctly better, her brain needed attention. Later we were relieved to know from Valia that what the doctors meant was 'the brain in Aruna's bones', presumably marrow.

When I first came to Sochi four months ago I almost shouted for joy at the sight of this beautiful spot, with its sea and hills, its pines and poplars, its palms and plantain trees. But now it affected me differently. It had been raining, there was a heaviness in the air, and the hills were hidden in fog like Eliot's True Church, 'wrapt in the old miasmal mist'. Moreover, the hour was melancholy, the hour of sunset. The house in which we were accommodated could not revive our spirits. Burobin had arranged for us to stay at the Riviera, overlooking the sea, but Borisov, the Chief of this resort, decided in his kindness to put us in a secluded dacha in the Tsurupa Sanatorium. This dacha was

situated in a grove, full of trees which prevented the sun from ever penetrating. From my childhood I had fancied such a dense growth of trees to be the haunt of evil spirits; I have always felt like running away from them. The dacha, small, cosy and comfortable, was like a honeymoon cottage, an ideal abode for the poet, the lover and the madman. Not belonging to any of these categories I felt ill at ease; I almost suffered from claustrophobia. I said so to Chary and told him a joke about claustrophobia which almost relieved us of it. The director of a factory which employed girls asked them to fill in a form, in which one of the questions was, 'Do you suffer from claustrophobia?' Ninety-eight per cent of the girls wrote 'yes'. Since this was an unusually high percentage the director called some of the girls and asked them whether they were sure that they did suffer from claustrophobia. 'Yes, Sir,' one of them said. 'We looked up the dictionary and found that claustrophobia meant "fear of confinement".'

During the first few days in Sochi we were in a perpetual state of somnolence. We could do nothing but sleep, sleep, sleep. This used to be my state when I went to my home in Travancore after my spells of duty in the North-West Frontier Province. The change from Moscow to Sochi was comparable to the change from Peshawar to Travancore; it was a change from a dry, bracing and, in the winter, cold and grim region to a warm, slightly humid and pleasantly relaxing climate. The doctors told me that it took a visitor from Moscow three or four days to get acclimatized to Sochi.

LIFE IN THE SANATORIUM

LIFE in the sanatorium is strenuous, and one has to work for one's health. Here's a normal day's programme. I am up at 6, have coffee at 6.45 and must be ready every other day by 7.30 to go to Matsesta, ten kilometres away, for a sulphur bath. Two million baths are given there every year. At 9 I am back in the sanatorium, reeking of sulphur, and have an enormous breakfast. On the days on which I have a bath I am compelled to stay in bed for three hours to recover from its effects. At 1.00 I have

a massage, at 1 30 I go for physical culture, and at 2 00 I have my electric treatment. Lunch is at 2 45, and then, if the day is fine, we go to the sea shore and lie about there till sunset. Before dinner, and indeed, at any time when one is free, one can play chess, billiards, ping-pong, volley-ball or tennis. And after dinner there is always a film show, a concert or dancing.

The doctor who was in immediate charge of me was a bright, bouncing woman, black-haired and good-looking, bursting with energy and kindness. Her name was Valentina Alexandrovna. The massage too was administered by a woman, Anna Ivanovna, and the physical exercises were taught by Ekaterina Akalovna. What long, sonorous and mellifluous names Russian women have! They almost answer to Manu's description. 'Let the names of women,' said Manu, 'be good to pronounce—sweet, simple and pleasant, let them terminate in long vowels and resemble words of benediction.'

Few foreigners have had an opportunity to live with Russians in a home for Russians as I had in Sochi. What struck me most was the spirit of comradeship which existed not merely between the staff and the inmates of the sanatorium but among the staff themselves. This was by no means the largest of the 56 sanatoria in Sochi and yet it had an ample staff, consisting of doctors and nurses, dentists and other specialists, a first class catering establishment and miscellaneous officials such as a librarian, swimming instructor, cinema operator, a social secretary and numerous gardeners. They were all differently paid, but inequality of pay did not denote inequality in status. There were no 'superiors', 'subordinates' and 'menials' among them, as there used to be, even in terminology, in India in the old days. They all addressed one another by name, the juniormost nurse would call the seniormost doctor by his name without a 'Dr', 'Mr', 'Sir', or even 'Comrade'.

Our housemaid, Kila, was a stalwart Ukrainian. Normally she had an eight hour working day, from 8 to 5 with an hour's break. But she came ungrudgingly for an additional hour or two, doing odd jobs such as preparing the bath for me at 8 p.m. and lighting the bath for my wife at 4 a.m. The waitresses too seemed to take a joy in their work. They treated the customers with an informality and familiarity which would have been misunderstood, and even resented, in other countries. We nicknamed one of the

waitresses *Pochemu*, which means 'why?' Our meals consisted of many dishes which she served with much pleasure, explaining the virtues of each; and if we left any dish untouched or unfinished, she would say '*Pochemu?*' with such an injured air that we felt obliged to offer her a full explanation of our conduct.

Every inmate of this resort received individual attention. The meanest coal-miner who came to Sochi for rest and recuperation received as much attention as the members of the Supreme Soviet. Indeed, the coal-miners had one of the grandest sanatoria in Sochi. In some respects we were pampered as foreigners, and specially perhaps as Indians. We had a dacha to ourselves while the others were housed together in a couple of two-storeyed buildings. We had a luxurious car at our disposal which we were at liberty to take wherever we liked; others had to be content with buses which left the sanatorium at fixed intervals. The food was excellent; breakfast, for instance, consisted of porridge, cold ham, caviare, eggs, a meat dish, fresh vegetables like tomato and cucumber, apple tart, cheese and coffee. To us even wines were served. Wines, but not liquors, for whisky and vodka were forbidden. Light Georgian wines were recommended and supplied; and some were so delicious that even Anujee had a sip occasionally. Muscat, which to me was nauseatingly sweet, was her favourite.

The comforts available in the sanatoria in Sochi, however, formed a glaring contrast to the privations suffered by the ordinary citizens. Bread was cheap and plentiful for them but hardly anything else. There were long queues in front of the milk shops and fruit shops, and fruit disappeared within a few minutes of its appearance on the stall. Medicines were good and cheap, but wrapped in paper packages of which an Indian village astrologer-physician would be ashamed. A thermometer had to be placed under the armpit for ten minutes before it registered your temperature. The nurses were astonished to see that I had with me a thermometer which worked in thirty seconds. In Sochi, as elsewhere, there was an acute scarcity of consumer goods. Our thermos flask got broken and we searched the whole town in vain to replace it. If this is the position in a show place like Sochi, the predicament in other towns and, even more, in the countryside, can be imagined. Vigorous efforts are now being made to improve the situation and to increase the quantity and

quality of consumer goods, and a spate of decrees has been issued by the Government with this end in view. To provide the entire population of the Soviet Union even tolerably adequately with consumer goods is, however, a herculean task, and I shall not be surprised if, for some years, at any rate, the result of the measures now being taken is to increase the disparity between that small section of the people who can afford to buy luxuries, and the much larger number of people who cannot. If that is the case, there will grow in the Soviet Union a comfortable bourgeoisie—a development in which the non-communist world will doubtless take an ironical pleasure.

THE SEVENTH OF NOVEMBER

OUR sanatorium celebrated the 36th anniversary of the Revolution. There were only half a dozen foreigners in the sanatorium, a distinguished looking German, flaunting his Peace Medal, with Picasso's dove on it, and his equally handsome wife, a writer from Iceland, a Norwegian woman, the daughter of a former Norwegian Ambassador to Russia, and my wife, Das Gupta and myself. We were cordially invited to join the celebrations. They began on the evening of the 6th with a meeting which was addressed by a bespectacled, bemedalled woman who we were told, was a library worker. She gave a review, full of imposing statistics, of the achievements of the Communist Party during the last three decades. It was then suggested to us that we might go round and see the illuminations in the city. From the front of every public building the figure XXXVI blazed forth in coloured lights. There were numerous pictures of Lenin and Stalin and, in one or two places, of Marx and Engels. Nowhere was there a picture of Malenkov. Evidently the principle of collectivity, now in fashion, forbade the cult of leadership. Stalin now stood in a different category, he had joined the ranks of the immortals, but the adoration bestowed on him as an immortal fell far below what he received in his lifetime.

There was a certain monotony about the illuminations which we saw in Sochi. My own thoughts were elsewhere. Tonight, I remembered, there would be illuminations in my country too.

Not to celebrate the Bolshevik Revolution, but to celebrate that immemorial festival Divali, the Festival of Lights. From the Himalayas to Cape Comorin there would be lamps everywhere. In towns and villages, in the peasants' mud huts and in the princes' marble mansions there would be lights. Lights of every description, electric lights, gas lights, earthen lights and millions of little brass lamps, fed by ghee or by coconut oil. For one glorious night India would forget her sorrows in a sea of illuminations.

On the morning of the 7th we watched a long procession in celebration of the anniversary of the Revolution. It consisted of a succession of teams—teams of school boys and school girls, soldiers and sportsmen, office hands and factory workers and inmates of the 56 sanatoria with which Sochi is studded. It took two hours for the procession to pass the vantage spot from which we saw it. The procession was altogether too well organized for my taste. How different, I reflected, was it from the mammoth Divali crowds in India, unorganized and disorderly, which would be making their way at this very minute to the shrines and temples in India, singing, chanting, praying, letting off fire-crackers, trampling on one another's toes, and all borne along, almost involuntarily, on a swelling tide of human and religious emotion! But India was celebrating a festival sanctified by three thousand years of tradition; and the Soviet Union was celebrating an event which, thirty-six years ago, seemed to be the wildest of ventures and has come to be the starkest reality of the twentieth century.

The most enjoyable function of all was a luncheon party which merged into a tea party and went on almost up to dinner time. Though it was meant to be a ceremonial affair there were hardly any political speeches and the Russians behaved as good Russians and not as keen communists. The director of the sanatorium proposed, duty-bound, a toast to the Communist Party and to the Government. 'Now the official part of the proceedings is over,' he concluded, 'and you can enjoy yourselves.'

There were a few more toasts—to the Sanatorium, to its director and his wife, to the guests, to the doctors and nurses and, most important of all, to the chief cook. The cook, who was ceremoniously introduced to the party, took his seat at the table, proposed and seconded toasts, and danced with the sprightliest maiden

as well as the stately matron. The only political note was introduced by Laxness Haldor, a writer from Iceland, who said that his small country had been under foreign rule for seven hundred years but had survived it. Iceland was now again under foreign occupation—presumably he was referring to the American bases—and would survive this phase also. The German, flaunting his peace medal, proposed, as was appropriate, a toast to Peace between Peoples. He spoke in German with great fervour and reminded his audience that he was speaking in a language in which Goethe wrote and Beethoven sang—and, I uncharitably thought, in which Hitler ranted and Goebbels broadcast. It fell to me to reply to the toast to the guests. I was doing so, I said, because, having stayed in the sanatorium longer than my fellow guests, I had become their doyen. I said I was going to be quite selfish and would propose a toast to the friendship between my country and the Soviet Union. This was greeted with a tremendous burst of applause and the entire party stood and clapped their hands, so much so that I cut short my speech and, as is the custom here, joined in the clapping and drank the toast to Indo-Soviet friendship.

After the toast the luncheon party resolved itself into a musical party. There were community songs and group dancing in which even we took part—Das Gupta with alacrity, Anujee gracefully, and myself clumsily. It was the first time that I saw Anujee dance. She dislikes the ultra-modern, breast to breast dances, but arm-in-arm she does not mind. Towards the evening the Georgian wine began to work, the subconscious came into play, and the Russians sang many old songs on love and life which they must have learnt from their pre Revolution mothers. And we felt that we were in the presence, not of heroic Soviet men, but of simple and delightfully natural Russians.

STORMS AND SUNSETS

ON the 7th of November and, indeed, throughout the month which we had planned to spend here we had glorious weather. So glorious was it that we decided to extend our stay by a week. This was unfortunate, for on the 16th it started raining. There

was a strong wind making the trees sway almost horizontally from side to side. The slender poplars swayed more than others but somehow they stood their ground, while a strong-looking tree in front of our dacha crashed almost on to our roof like a man who is outwardly strong but collapses in a crisis. This storm was worse than monsoonish; it was accompanied by a biting wind and piercing cold. Our dacha was not cold-proof; it had no central heating. There was, however, an old-fashioned Russian stove in our bedroom which heated, and over-heated, it. To pass from our bedroom in one corner of the house to the bathroom in another was like going from the Tropics to the Arctic zone. It was also a torture to wade through water from the dacha to the dining hall, some distance away. The more it rained the more the clouds seemed to gather. The sun disappeared. So did the moon and the stars. This was a pity, for it was approaching full moon.

On our last evening there was a sudden break in the weather. The clouds were gone; the wind had dropped; and on our way to the dining hall we saw the full moon in all its glory. But the Black Sea was still in a temper; she was baring her bosom to the moon, like an evil woman giving herself defiantly to her customer. 'Let's go down to the sea and watch it,' I said, but I was promptly overruled by Anujee and Das Gupta, both of whom preferred to go to the cinema. I returned home sulkily and listened to some music from *Pikovaya Dama* (The Queen of Spades). Two hours later Anujee and Das Gupta came back; and I said 'Serves you right,' when I heard that the picture they had seen was a putrid, though supposedly amusing one regarding the opening, despite the protest of the citizens, of a urinal in a French provincial town. The urinal was opened by the mayor who himself solemnly used it first; and a number of lesser dignitaries followed, each performing this act of nature with appropriate dignity.

In Sochi my greatest joy was to go to the sea-shore and watch the Black Sea in all her moods. She has as many moods as a variable woman. Generally she is calm and serene, but on the appearance of clouds she would become black and sullen, justifying her name. Sometimes, lashed by winds, she would turn into a foaming, boiling, raging cauldron. And I love her in all her moods. Not Anujee. Frankly she is not over-fond of the sea;

she prefers simpler pleasures. It thrills her to see the first rays of the sun lighting up the tops of the trees, to feel the gentle zephyr, stirring the leaves to life, and to hear the rustle of the leaves like the hoarse whisper of first love into the ear of one's beloved. But the sea is altogether too noisy and boisterous and unpredictable for her. Still, moved by a sense of wisely duty, she would often accompany me to the sea shore. There I would read poetry to her and recite how

I have stared upon a dawn
And trembled like a man in love,

and we would both laugh over the rest of the poem, which is not particularly complimentary to wives. We would watch the sunset together and count the exact number of minutes and seconds the sun would take to sink into the sea after its lower rim had touched the watery surface. Sometimes the sun would dip into the sea like an enormous over ripe orange, sometimes, like a sick man with a bloated face, making a last grimace at the world he was leaving, sometimes like a conqueror, red and angry that he has so little time to subjugate the world. One sunset which I shall never forget was that which we saw on 1 November. There were a few clouds on the western horizon. They took on the most fanciful hues and produced the most fantastic effects. We almost felt that we were being treated to a celestial ballet of the seasons. When the sun was about to set the clouds turned green like trees in spring, and in between them there were pools of the deepest blue. Then they turned pink and red, like a forest in flames. The red, too, faded and gave way to the colours of autumn, gold and copper and purple, and finally, after the sun had set, all was gray and black, as in a snowless winter. Here was a heavenly dance of the seasons as beautiful as that which we saw in the Bolshoi theatre where, at the behest of the fairy god-mother, ballerinas representing the different seasons and dressed in appropriate colours dance in the presence of Cinderella, bringing her their most precious gifts.

SNOW IN SOCHI

IN the course of an overland journey from Delhi to Chungking twelve years ago, I spent a night in a queer spot which geologists call a 'fault' on the face of the earth, the Turfan depression, some eight hundred feet below sea level. On the day of my arrival there was a snowfall, which had never occurred there before; and this provoked the soldier-poet, General Chu Shao-liang, into composing a poem, 'It Snows in Turfan'. If I were a poet I should have composed a poem, 'It Snows in Sochi', for there too a snowfall is rare, and yet it was snowing when we arrived in Sochi in the last week of March for my second course of treatment.

We left Moscow by train on 27 March, 1956. For the first twenty-four hours we passed, as we expected, through a desert of snow. There was no sign of life anywhere, except for an occasional cluster of huts. Those too looked deserted, but if one looked closer one saw a thin wraith of smoke, rising from the chimneys, which showed that there were human beings inside. What they do, or how they live, for the seven months of winter has always been a mystery to me. There were no roads worth the name near the villages; lack of communications in the rural areas is, as Khrushchev said at the XXth Congress, a grim legacy from the past which the Communist Government has not yet been able to liquidate. On the whole, the countryside answered to Gogol's description of it in *Dead Souls* which Anujee had been reading. 'Russia! Russia!', she read out to me; 'I behold thee, from my lovely faraway paradise, I behold thee! It is poor, neglected and comfortless in thee, no insolent marvels of nature crowned by insolent marvels of art, no towns with many-windowed lofty palaces piled on precipitous heights, no picturesque trees, no ivy-clad houses in the roar and everlasting spray of waterfalls rejoice the eye or strike awe into the heart; the head is not turned to gaze at the rocks piled up on the heights above it; no everlasting lines of shining mountains rising into the silvery pure skies gleam in the distance through dark arches, scattered one upon the other in a tangle of vines, ivy and wild roses beyond number. In thee all is open, desolate, flat; thy lowly towns lie

scattered like dots, like specks unseen among thy plains, there is nothing to allure or captivate the eye '¹ Written a hundred years ago, this is as true of rural Russia today as it was then

On the afternoon of the 28th the snow gradually began to diminish and patches of brown earth began to appear Tomorrow, we thought, we shall be in sunny Sochi, with its evergreens, its palms and its banana trees I woke up early on the 29th only to find snow lying even heavier than in Moscow No wonder, for the train was now crossing the Caucasus! Presently the train made its way along a blue expanse of water of which the shore was covered with snow It was the Black Sea, wearing a blue saree with a silver border

We came to Sochi in search of warmth, but Moscow's weather had come with us However, we were soon enveloped in the warmth of the welcome which was extended to us by the Director, doctors and staff of the sanatorium, none of whom had changed since we came here seventeen months ago Here our life was very different from that in Moscow No politics and no diplomacy, no vodka whisky or cocktail parties, no telephones or typewriters, no dispatches to send no memoirs to write Only fresh air, good food, Georgian wines, books and music, massage and physiculture sulphur baths for me and sea baths for Anujee.

On our way to the dining room we noticed that the XXth Congress did not leave even our sanatorium unaffected There used to be a statuette of Stalin here, fondling a child in his arms It was no longer there The bare pedestal was still there, crying for the honour of holding his successor But no artist has yet given human form to Stalin's vaunted successor, the principle of collectivity

SOCHI IN SPRING

We spent four pleasant weeks in Sochi Life in the sanatorium was exactly as on the previous occasion The only difference was that the person assigned to administer sulphur baths to me was not as in 1954, an old woman, but a bright vivacious and

¹ Constance Garnett's translation

delightfully garrulous creature. When I was immersed in the bath she would come in in order to take my pulse, though this was really the business of the nurse. When I was having a compulsory rest of twenty minutes after the bath, Makarova would come and sit by my side and chatter away. She would talk of Kalinin, her home town, and Leningrad, where she was educated, and India, as she fancied it, and Raj Kapur and Nargis, of whom she was a devoted fan. I was sorry to see the last of her when I had my last bath on the 20th of April; and she had tears in her eyes when I said good-bye to her.

How quickly tears rise to the eyes of Russians! Mama and Vera cannot see a photograph of Unni, Kутten or Chinna without shedding a tear. Last month Valia came with us to see *Othello*. For the first two hours she faithfully played the role of interpreter, explaining a sentence here and a sentence there, but during the last scene she was strangely silent. She confessed to us later that she had been weeping. When our film, *Do Bigha Zamin*, was shown to a Moscow audience, not a Russian eye remained dry. And when Khrushchev recently spoke on the cruelties of Stalin to his compatriots, he was reported to have been often on the verge of tears, and three times beyond it.

Shedding tears, however, is not an exclusively Russian trait. Harold Nicolson, in his fascinating book, *Good Behaviour*, writes that Englishmen used to indulge in this luxury unabashed almost up to the beginning of this century. Fox, Pitt and even Wellington wept effectively in public. It was what Nicolson calls the 'Tom Brown tradition' which made it ungentlemanly for men and unladylike for women to shed tears. Nevertheless, Nicolson records that even in our own days he has had occasion to see Curzon and Churchill cry privately but very hard. Khrushchev was thus in respectable company.

Our twin joys in Sochi were to watch the moods of the Black Sea and the onset of spring. Our first visit to Sochi was at the height of summer. Our subsequent visit was in the autumn. This is the first time we are seeing Sochi in the spring. Spring came like some invisible wizard, touching the objects of nature, sometimes one by one, sometimes collectively. In the beautiful garden of this sanatorium the weeping willow, spreading its branches over our dacha, was the first to wake up. The last to do so were the poplars, which were still asleep when we left.

On a Friday early this month, we tried to go to the top of Mt Akhun but found that the summit was covered with snow. The trees on the hillside had no leaves. But on the following Monday the whole hillside was wearing a mantle of green. A week-end of blazing sunshine had brought spring to the Caucasus.

After all the excitement of the XXth Congress in Moscow we felt like lotus eaters in Sochi. The only occasion when ceremony intruded on us was on 21 April when the 86th anniversary of Lenin's birthday was celebrated. On that day Anujee and I also celebrated a private event, which fell on the same day, the 33rd anniversary of our marriage. In the evening we attended the Lenin memorial meeting organized by the City Soviet in the local theatre. A long speech was made, but it dealt not with Lenin the thinker, and still less with Lenin the man, but with Lenin the organizer of communism. Stalin was not mentioned at all, and Lenin's name was used mainly as a peg on which to hang the brilliant record of communist achievements during the last four decades. After the lecture we were treated to a play, called *The Crystal Key*, dealing with life in an out-of-the-way frontier station during the war. The play ended tragically, and we saw our hostess, the Mayor's wife, smothering her sobs in her handkerchief.

AZERBAIJAN

FROM THE BLACK SEA TO THE CASPIAN

ON the day on which we left Sochi the Black Sea was in a black mood. For a whole month she had behaved herself; now she showed that she had a temper. She reminded me of the young and charming, but impulsive, Maharaja of Bharatpur who flew into a temper and, when I remonstrated, 'Your Highness, you should really try and control your temper,' replied disarmingly, 'But surely, Mr Menon, I did keep my temper for a whole month!'

Throughout April the Black Sea remained calm. She lay gently, like a bride, rippling into happy smiles by the side of the Caucasus. Now she was like a virago, pitting her strength against the coast, lashing it with a thousand tongues and making inroads into its whole composition. And yet a solitary ship was bravely riding the rowdy waves. It reminded me of Nehru, steering the ship of state, defying all cross-currents, Leftist and Rightist, Communist and Communalist, Stalinist and Sanatanist.

After a month's stay we left Sochi on 27 April. The inmates of the sanatorium, who hailed from all parts of the Soviet Union—from the Urals, the Ukraine, Siberia and elsewhere—assembled in front of our dacha and waved their hands in farewell and said in unison: 'Hindi-Russi Bhai Bhai' and 'Panch Shila ki Jai'.

After the first few hours our train ran along the coast. The Black Sea was as angry as in the morning and seemed to have an animus even against the railway line. However, darkness soon descended and blotted it all out. The train passed Sukhumi, Sochi's rival sanatorium, at about midnight and turned inwards towards the Caspian Sea. And we turned into our beds.

The next morning we rose into a scene of unusual beauty. We were now passing through the Caucasus towards Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. We followed the course of the Kura, a mountain torrent, leaping over rocks and boulders and swiftly running in a series of twists and turns between high banks. In its impetuosity this unnavigable river was symbolic of the Georgian

spirit, free, ebullient and somewhat unmanageable, a spirit which showed itself lately in rising against the denunciation of Stalin. At about 8 a.m. we passed Stalin's birth-place, Gori. It was situated on a bend of the river, with an old fort standing on a picturesque hillock, and the snow-covered Caucasus behind it.

We reached Tbilisi at about 9 and had to wait there for six hours in order to catch the train for Baku. We had planned to remain at the station but a number of Georgian dignitaries met us, took us to a lovely dacha and gave us an excellent lunch, Georgian wines freely flowing. We noticed that an enormous statue of Lenin was being put up in a square which, on our first visit to Tbilisi, was known as Beria Square and, immediately after his fall, was christened Lenin Square.

We left Tbilisi at 3. The Kura was no longer our companion, she took a different course to the Caspian Sea. The scenery was now flat and drab and we went off to sleep till dusk, when we crossed the border of Georgia into Azerbaijan. At about 10 p.m. we passed the town which was the birth-place of the greatest son of Azerbaijan, the poet Nizami. It was then known as Ganja but after the Revolution was named Kirovabad, after Kirov, the Russian communist leader. Nizami, however, is still called Nizami Ganjavi, and not Nizami Kirovabadli.

We then tried to sleep for the night, but could not. I cannot sleep on an empty stomach and we had nothing to eat. There was no restaurant car on the train and all we could get to eat at a wayside station was some fat sausages. They looked so uninviting that Anujee and I did not touch them, but Kumar was brave enough to tackle them. He said that they tasted like raw pig, and we told him that he would now grunt even more than before. The Tbilisi-Baku train was slow, like most Russian trains; it took twenty hours to cover 350 miles. It stopped at every station with a violent jerk. Whenever it stopped or started we felt that we were going to be thrown out of our berths. Anujee said that all night she felt that the train was going off the rails, but was being forcefully pulled back, like Sukumaran, Ratnam's servant, who turned the gas on in Moscow and tried to commit suicide and was saved from the jaws of death by Masha who opened the door and found him unconscious. The driver of the train was evidently a novice. Or was he a misanthrope? He had to keep awake through the night and he saw no reason why the passengers

should sleep if he could not. He certainly saw to it that they didn't !

On the morning of the 29th we had our first glimpse of the Caspian Sea. This region was very different from the Black Sea coast. There were no great trees, no wild flowers, no tropical shrubs, no big mountain stooping down to the sea. Only oil, oil everywhere. Oil pipes, oil tanks, oil installations. Sand and mud, from which oil oozed, like sweat dripping from the unexercised body of an unhealthy moneylender. Presently a forest of chimneys appeared, showing how highly industrialized this region had become. Another violent jerk, the train came to a standstill, and we were in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, the southernmost seaport in the Soviet Union and one of the richest centres of oil in the world.

A CITY OF OIL

BAKU was in a gay mood on our arrival. On the previous day she had celebrated the 36th anniversary of her incorporation into the Soviet Union and in two days she would celebrate May Day. The flags for both occasions fluttered together in careless profusion and lent a little colour to this drab city.

The city of Baku is divided into two regions, Chorni Gorod (black town) and Byeli Gorod (white town). The Byeli Gorod is the main residential area; and the Chorni has hundreds of factories, belching smoke. A drive through Chorni Gorod left on us the same crude sense of power as our drive through Silesia last year. There power came from coal; here from oil. We were told that no less than 703 by-products of oil were being manufactured in these factories. All the machinery for their manufacture was also being produced in or near Baku. We were particularly interested in a factory in which gas, which came from the bowels of the earth together with oil, was separated from its companion and turned into petrol and synthetic rubber.

Most of the oil is extracted from the Apsheron Peninsula, but now it is beginning to be extracted from the bed of the sea as well. It has been known for some time that the Caspian Sea is a fertile source of oil but the difficulty was that oil could not be

extracted from it without having a land base on which the oil-boring machine could be located. This difficulty has now been got over by the creation of a number of artificial islands in the Caspian Sea. We visited one of those islands, 70 kilometres from Baku. In that island oil was being extracted from a depth of 2500 feet. There are, however, machines capable of boring down to 5000 feet. The various methods of boring were explained to us. The latest is called turbine-boring, a process which has been perfected by Soviet engineers, and the USA has just bought a number of machines of this type from the Soviet Government.

In the evening we were shown the film of a man-made island even bigger than the one which we had visited. There a regular township has grown, with oil-boring engines, prefabricated houses, cinema halls, sports grounds and dance floors. Three years ago the sea, covered with oil, caught fire, and the film showed how the workmen on the island struggled with the fire for six days and nights, brought it under control, and thus saved themselves and their island from destruction. It was an eerie sight. I used to think that the Soviet Government was ambitious in providing a hundred per cent increase of oil in its Sixth Five Year Plan. Having been to Baku and seen the way in which oil was being extracted from the hitherto untapped bed of the Caspian Sea, I feel certain that this enormous increase in the output of oil can, and will, be achieved.

If Baku is a city of oil, it is also a city of winds. The name is derived from two Persian words which mean 'driven by wind'. Our friends told me that strong winds would be blowing in the Baku region for 300 out of 365 days. We certainly had not struck a windless patch. When we were taken to see a factory manufacturing synthetic rubber we were almost blown off our feet, and Anujee's sari got so puffed up that she walked like a balloon on two legs! In the evening the rains came, and we were afraid that the next morning's May Day celebrations were going to be ruined. Hearing of Anujee's religious proclivities, our hosts implored her to pray for good weather. In the morning it was not clear whether God had answered her prayers or not, for it drizzled but did not rain. In the afternoon, however, there was glorious sunshine, in which we saw an exciting football match between Baku and Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Our Azerbaijani friends laughingly suggested that after all Anujee's

Indian God was a long way off and that her message could not have reached him in time to send good weather for the morning celebrations, but must have reached him before the evening's football match.

The May Day Parade was held in a spacious square, with Government House at our back, the Caspian Sea in front, and the two arms of the Baku harbour to our right and left. Further to our right lay Chorni Gorod, with its numerous factories, sending up smoke; and to the left was a hillock, crowned by an enormous statue of Kirov, with outstretched arms dominating the entire city. Baku's May Day celebrations were a minor replica of Moscow's. There were parades, speeches, slogans and processions. Buildings were decorated with pictures of communist leaders. Stalin's pictures were not as prominent as they used to be in his life-time. Now Lenin was all in all. Sometimes a picture of Stalin would appear to Lenin's right; sometimes to his left, with Khrushchev on the right; sometimes it would not appear at all. For instance, in front of Government House there were large pictures of Marx and Lenin and smaller pictures of Bulganin and Khrushchev and other Members of the Presidium, but none of Stalin. In the people's processions some organizations carried Stalin's pictures, others did not. Stalin has been deflated but not destroyed.

Baku was Stalin's training-ground as a revolutionary. There he learnt how to deal with the masses and received, to use his own phrase, his 'revolutionary baptism in combat'. Passing under different names—Koba, Gagoz Nishardze and Zakhar Gregorian Malikyants—evading the police, hiding among the Tartars in the Balakhna oilfields and lecturing, agitating and pamphleteering, Stalin kept up the revolutionary flame among the workers of Baku, whom Lenin praised as 'our last Mohicans of the political mass strike'. Yet our guide in the historical museum of Baku did not even mention his name. Three years previously she would have waxed eloquent over his 'glorious deeds'. I spotted a youthful picture of Stalin, inconspicuously placed among a number of other revolutionary workers, and asked her if that was not Stalin. She looked at her companion and sheepishly said yes.

At the end of Stalin's life, Baku was very different from what it had been when he was there as an agitator. In the nineteenth

century the oil of Baku had been mainly in foreign hands, and the workers were a motley crowd. Russians and Armenians made up 48 per cent, 42 per cent were Persians, Tartars and Lezgirs, and 10 per cent were Turks. They were too disorganized to be able to stand up to their employers. I was told that in many oilfields there was no regular system of payment, wages were often called *bakshish*, or, as Stalin said, *bashkesh*. The Muslims lived in a world of their own. Blood feuds were not uncommon, self-flagellation was practised by some tribes, and women were in *purdah*. To have transformed such a primitive, amorphous community into a modern, industrialized State must be reckoned one of the major achievements of Soviet rule.

CULTURE ON THE CASPIAN COAST

ON the evening of our arrival we went to see an opera, *Leila-Majnun*. This was the first opera to appear on the Baku stage and has been running without a break for forty six years. Originally written in Persian by Nizami, the poem *Leila-Majnun* was turned into the Azerbaijani language in the sixteenth century by Fisihi Baghdadi. I asked our companion why he was called Baghdadi. Because, I was told, Fisihi was educated in Baghdad for some time. I might as well call myself Menon Oxford!

I must confess I was a little disappointed with the opera. The trouble is that since coming to Moscow my standards have become exacting. I cannot bear anything which falls appreciably short of the Bolshoi standards. Leila, like most opera singers, was fat though when she walked in the May Day procession the next day, and waved to us, we thought that she was quite attractive. She was an expert in the art of sobbing and weeping, for which these two star crossed lovers seem to have been specially created. The music had a haunting quality about it and was perfectly entrancing. I was glad that the new-fangled and somewhat superfluous orchestra did not spoil it, for most of the time the orchestra kept quiet. I used to think that the music of Uzbekistan was closest to the music of India, but the music of Azerbaijan seems to be even closer. It has an affinity not merely with the music of North India but with that of the South.

If we were shown the oldest opera in Azerbaijan, we were also invited to the newest, called *Sevil*. Its theme is the emancipation of women. In the beginning of the opera *Sevil* appears, a veiled, vague and nervous creature. Later, in response to the call of the Revolution and reacting to her husband's ill-treatment, she tears up her veil, goes to Leningrad, takes a university degree and becomes a free member of a free society. It is now the husband's turn to ask for her forgiveness but she refuses to grant it. An Indian play on such a theme would have ended in a touching scene of reconciliation, but in the communist vocabulary there is no such word as forgiveness. Whether it will creep in as a result of the XXth Congress remains to be seen.

Our friends in Azerbaijan were anxious to impress on us the affinities between India and Azerbaijan. Rahimov told me that Khrushchev, while giving to the Central Committee his impression of India, said that he had noticed a striking resemblance between the Kashmiris and the people of some of the Soviet Central Asian Republics. He and Bulganin had been wondering whom the Kashmiris resembled most and had come to the conclusion that they were closest to the Azerbaijanis. In another way, too, Kashmir was well-known in Azerbaijan. Under a long-standing custom, a bridegroom in Azerbaijan is expected to present his bride with a Kashmir shawl and there is hardly any household in Azerbaijan without a shawl from Kashmir. There is a long-standing trade connexion between India and Azerbaijan. Silk merchants used to come here, mostly from Multan and its neighbourhood; and there used to be a Multani Serai in Shimakha, the capital of Azerbaijan from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. All traces of this Serai and almost all traces of Shimakha itself have been wiped out by an earthquake. The connexion with Multan, however, survives in a quaint colloquial expression, still current. Apparently the merchants from Multan tried to pick up the Azerbaijani language, but spoke it badly; and even today when an Azerbaijani child speaks in a crude or ungrammatical way the elders ask 'Why do you speak Multani?'

Most surprising of all was to find an Indian temple in the vicinity of Baku. Formerly regarded as Zoroastrian in origin and frequently referred to by foreign travellers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a temple of fire-worshippers, it appears to have been a Hindu temple. The object of worship used to be

what foreign travellers called 'the inextinguishable fire', which might have been some form of gas, as in the sacred Jwalamukhi temple in the Himalayas. There were a number of cells in which pilgrims lived, and perhaps merchants halted on their way to the interior of Azerbaijan. The entrance to these cells still bears inscriptions in stone, in Devanagari, Gurmukhi and Persian, containing an invocation to God, a quotation from the Scriptures, the name of the donor of the cell, sometimes the name of the mason, and the date. Architecturally there is nothing striking about this temple. Yet it is a touching reminder of the spirit of adventure and piety which led Indians in past centuries to seek a livelihood on the coast of the Caspian Sea and to build a second Jwalamukhi there.

ASTRAKHAN

A YEAR after this first visit to Baku we went to the Caspian coast again. This time we went by river and our destination was Astrakhan. We landed in Astrakhan on the 25th of June at the hottest hour of the day, 2 p.m. It gave us a regular Indian feeling. Astrakhan was as hot as any Indian town in summer, its flies were equally annoying, its flowers equally sweet smelling, its melons equally succulent, and its dust equally pervasive. And in order to make me feel completely at home, the tune 'Awara' was played wherever I went, and a picture of Lakshmi was hung above my bed in our hotel.

I was met on arrival by the Chairman of the City Soviet and other dignitaries. They showed me with gusto their new bridge, the new stadium, the swimming pool, the Pioneer Palace and the Park of Rest and Recreation. I was duly impressed and professed to be more impressed than I was, but I cannot say that I was thrilled by them. I have seen such things in every town of any importance in the Soviet Union and am becoming rather blasé about it all. I would have preferred to see something older and more characteristic of this region. On our way to the new and splendid bridge over the Volga, I noticed an impressive church and asked the Mayor what it was called and when it was built. He did not have the faintest idea and turned to the chauffeur for enlightenment. The chauffeur said that it was called the Church of

St Vladimir and that it was built 200 or 300 years ago. I asked the Mayor whether I might go in and have a look. 'What is the point in doing so?' said the Mayor. 'It is now used as a storehouse.'

In this town with 700 years of history behind it the oldest object which was shown to me was the theatre, built entirely of wood in the Russian style of 70 years ago by an unknown Russian architect, and elegantly painted in pink and green. It was a favourite of the people and a problem for the municipal authorities, for it was liable to catch fire. There were 'No Smoking' signs all over the theatre and a fire-engine was always standing by, but the people would not let it be closed. Its old and appropriate name, Arcadia, has been changed into Karl Marx Theatre. I could not think of anything more incongruous than giving a harsh German name to this gay Russian building.

Astrakhan, like Calcutta, is situated about 50 miles from the sea, and like the Ganges the Volga forms an enormous and intricate delta. The Mayor told me that in August the lagoon would be covered with lotus flowers. In legend, the lotus has an Indian origin. One of the Khans of this place had a beautiful wife called Astra. She contracted a serious illness from which there was no hope of recovery. A faqir told the Khan that far, far away in the east there was a country in which grew a lovely flower, the fragrance of which would cure his wife. Thereupon the Khan set out to India and after various adventures managed to obtain the seed of the lotus. He returned to Astrakhan only to find that his wife was dead. Thereupon he cast the seed into the lagoon, and it blossoms beautifully every year in the summer.

Astrakhan used to be the centre of the Kalmucks, a nomad people who migrated with their tents, carts and flocks from West China in the middle of the seventeenth century, in search of fresh woods and pastures new. For the last three centuries they have been the only Buddhist people in Europe. At many of the critical moments in Russian history, the Kalmucks stood by Russia. In the eighteenth century they joined the fight against Charles XII, whose soldiers, says a Kalmuck poem, 'Yorel', 'were more numerous than ants, more blood-thirsty than jackals, more crafty than snakes'. They also fought in the Seven Years' War and took part in the conquest of East Prussia. Ten Kalmuck regiments fought against Napoleon and three of them entered Paris on horseback in 1814. To quote from 'Yorel' again:

Together with the Russian eagles the Kalmucks
 defended their land
 Against greedy Napoleon
 Who wanted to bridle the whole world
 As if it were his horse
 Thus during three centuries,
 In countless battles,
 The earth was soaked
 With the blood of Kalmucks and Russians

After the Revolution, the right of the Kalmucks to autonomy was recognized and in 1920 the Kalmuck Autonomous Province was founded. In 1933 it was raised to the status of the Kalmuck Autonomous Republic. After the Second World War, however, when the Kalmucks were suspected of pro-German sympathies, the Kalmuck Autonomous Republic, like the Volga German Republic next door, was abrogated and the Kalmucks were dispersed in distant areas. One cannot but regret that so chivalrous a people have ceased to exist as a separate national entity.¹

If in the time of the Kalmucks the prosperity, such as it was, of Astrakhan depended on cattle, its prosperity today depends almost entirely on fish. More than half the adult population is engaged in some way or other in the fishing industry—in catching or processing fish. I visited the Mikoyan Fishing Combine, the largest of the kind in the Soviet Union. It was the slack season, no fishing being allowed in the river between June and September and in the sea between June and October. Fish-eating fishes, however, can be caught at any time of the year. I was greatly interested to see the production of caviare. There are caviare-tasters even as there are tea-tasters. Like tea tasters they are not allowed to smoke, but unlike tea tasters they are allowed, and indeed encouraged, to drink cognac, for that alone can neutralize the effects of the large quantities of caviare which they have to consume every day. On the whole, the Mikoyan Combine seemed to conduct its operations with the maximum of efficiency and the minimum of smell. We spent a whole day there and were greatly impressed by everything we saw. However, the sight of huge quantities of fish being boiled in oil, passed through pipes, cooled down, packed in tins and then kept for ten days in a

¹ The Kalmuck ASSR has since been restored

temperature of 37° degrees Centigrade so that any bacteria in them might show themselves and swell up the tins, was not exactly appetizing. After my visit to the Mikoyan Factory, I shall never again be able to taste tinned fish. Fortunately for me, caviare is often packed in glass containers.

At night we went to the Karl Marx theatre and saw Strauss's operetta, *The Bat*. It was a delightful performance, which combined dancing, acting and humour. The part of 'the woman in pink' was taken by a charming actress, Belatserkovskaya, whose husband is a producer in the Kuibyshev theatre. We invited them and a number of City Soviet officials to supper after the show. They stayed with us till 2 a.m. Belatserkovskaya told me that on the following night she was going to take the leading part in the opera *Lakmé* and implored me to stay on. I explained that if I did so I would have to answer to my wife, who was expected to arrive in Moscow the next day!

Astrakhan has indeed had a romantic history. I came across the name first in Milton's sonorous lines:

As when the Tartar from his Russian foe
By Astracan over the snowy plains
Retires, or Bactrian Sophi from the horns
Of Turkish crescent, leaves all waste beyond
The realm of Aladule, in his retreat
To Tauris or Casbeen.

Astrakhan was founded in the fourteenth century on the site of an older city, destroyed by Timur. Until the middle of the sixteenth century it was the capital of a Tartar Khanate. I looked longingly at the stone walls of the Kremlin and the graceful outlines of the churches inside. More than once I expressed a desire to see them, but the Mayor put me off on some pretext or other.

The Mayor however showed me the site of an old Indian colony which flourished in Astrakhan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indians lived in the heart of the city in what was called Indian Street. I was told that they played a significant part in the trade between Russia and the Trans-Caucasus region, Iran and India. The Tsar took a special interest in them. Among the articles imported and sold by them were carpets, silk, cotton fabrics, copper, leather goods, wool, gold and silver and precious stones. Some of them took Russian

wives and acquired Russian nationality. Among them was one Mogundasov (i.e., son of Mohan Das), a wealthy Indian merchant who had his own boats and fishing waters, owned a house worth 60,000 roubles and transacted business amounting to 100,000 roubles in 1826.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were Indian merchants also in other cities of the Soviet Union, such as Moscow and Yaroslav. Many of them must have travelled up and down the Volga. It is a pity that none of them have left any accounts of their travels, as an enterprising Englishman, Anthony Jenkinson, the Manager of the Muscovy Company in Moscow, has done. In 1558 he went on a journey down the Volga in company with the Governor-designate to Astrakhan, who had '500 great boates under his conduct'. Jenkinson found Kazan 'a fayre town with a strong castle. Being in the hands of the Tartarres, it did vex more the Russes in their warres than any other nation'. Jenkinson describes the nomad tribes who lived on the banks of the Volga and subsisted on meat and milk. From Astrakhan, he crossed the Caspian Sea into China. He returned to Russia the next year and presented the Tsar with a 'white cowes taile of Cathay'. Perhaps it was Jenkinson who inspired Marlowe to write, in *Tamburlaine the Great*, of

...Christian merchants, that with Russian stems
Plough up huge furrows in the Caspian Sea.

Perhaps Milton himself was indebted to Jenkinson for his reference to Astrakhan. How one wishes that some twentieth-century Milton or Marlowe in India or Russia would turn into a poem or ballet the lovely legend of the Khan of Astrakhan's quest for the lotus in India, a legend to which the yearly efflorescence of the lotus in the lagoons at the mouth of the Volga still bears testimony!

NOVGOROD THE GREAT

THE ROAD TO NOVGOROD

FOR many days our Russian staff had been trying, with greater pertinacity than success, to obtain accurate information regarding a journey by road to Leningrad. They simply could not get hold of a road map. Nor could they ascertain the exact distance to Leningrad: the estimates of the friends whom they consulted varied from 600 kilometres to 800. In Stalin's time all such information used to be treated as secret for reasons of security. It was also impossible for our staff to find out the name of a hotel in Kalinin or in Novgorod where we could break our journey. Nevertheless, Valia told us that hotel accommodation had been reserved for us both in Kalinin and in Leningrad. 'How did you manage that, without knowing the names of the hotels?' I asked. 'Oh, it was quite simple,' she said. 'I sent telegrams addressed to "The best hotel" in Kalinin and Novgorod.' 'But suppose there is a competition for the title of "the best hotel"?' I asked. 'The telegraph girl will use her discretion,' said Valia.

We left Moscow at 11.30 in the morning. It was the morrow of the hottest day of the year in Moscow, when the temperature reached 31° Centigrade. The Moscow Radio announced that it had never been hotter on June 11 during the last 70 years. Last week Moscow was still cool, but now it is mid-summer. In these parts the change from spring to summer is as abrupt as from winter to spring.

On our way we saw a number of Pioneer Camps. We also saw hundreds of children being transported in rows of buses from the dust-laden atmosphere of Moscow to the kindergartens established in the country for the summer. While approaching Klin, where Tchaikovsky the great composer spent the last years of his life, we saw dozens of aeroplanes, some single and others in formation, hovering about like birds bewildered by a shot. The Annual Air Parade was due to take place on 20 June.

Beyond a picturesque town with a picturesque name, 'town of sunny hills,' we chose a secluded spot in the woods by the side

of a stream and had lunch. We enjoyed our lunch, and would have enjoyed it more if swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitoes had not spotted us and attacked our exposed surfaces.

The road from Moscow to Leningrad runs straight as an arrow. There are few curves and hardly any ups and downs, and even the railway does not run so straight. The reason, I am told, is that the Emperor Nicholas I, who ordered the construction of the road, took a piece of paper and drew with a foot rule a line between Moscow and St Petersburg. His thumb made one involuntary little curve on the pencil line and the engineers faithfully followed it.

We reached Kalinin, 170 kilometres from Moscow, at about 4.30. Valia was right: the telegraph girl had exercised her discretion wisely, for the best hotel in Kalinin was expecting us. It was called Hotel Seliger after the lake from which the Volga takes its source. The hotel looked quite imposing from the outside, though the first sight that came to view was that of a large gentleman in loose pyjamas standing nonchalantly at the entrance. Our rooms were small, but neat and tidy, and a telephone and a radio had been installed. We even had that luxury of luxuries, a bath. But there was none in Valia's room. When she asked whether she might have a bath, the maid replied: 'Certainly, the river is just across the road.'

We left Kalinin in the morning, passed a church, crowned by a star instead of a cross, and crossed the Volga. To me it was a memorable experience. Memories came of historic events enacted on its banks, of invasions and counter-invasions, of the Volga Boat Song and of Chaliapin, who was its greatest singer and was destined to spend the last decades of his life in exile.

All went well for the first hundred miles of our trip. The road was excellent and we did 60 miles in the first hour. On both sides of the road were woods of birch, pine and poplar, interspersed with meadows and, very occasionally, with fields of wheat. Here and there we could see anti-tank devices which had been erected against the Germans, and churches riddled with bullet holes. This reminded us that the area through which we were travelling had been under German occupation during the war. This week ten years ago, the long-awaited Second Front had been launched, and the democratic world, which then included Russia as well as the UK and the USA, breathed a sigh of relief.

After we had done a hundred miles we entered a bad patch of road. We then saw a funeral which, said Valia, was regarded by the Russians as a good omen. So is it in India, I said, especially when one starts on a journey. But the sight of a priest in Russia is as inauspicious as that of a single Brahmin in Malabar. The funeral brought us luck; the road improved miraculously. But not for long. Beyond Lake Valdai, where the land was undulating and the scenery beautiful, the road become execrable. It had been raining and we had to negotiate pools of mud. Hardly would we surmount one bad bit of road when another, and still another, would encounter us. Our Humber went over it all, occasionally giving an angry growl. Fortunately, many regiments of soldiers had been put to work on the roads; and in order to encourage them to work hard, there were exhibited at every few furlongs large notice boards containing exhortations from the speeches of Lenin and Stalin. The strain of driving was too much for Vania, who had been recently suffering from pernicious anaemia. He was seized by a violent fit of sickness, vomited uncontrollably and nearly collapsed on the road.

Fortunately this happened within sight of Novgorod. Domes and spires and churches began to appear on the horizon. It looked as if beautiful pictorial illustrations, executed by some medieval divine on an illuminated manuscript, had been cut out and pasted in the sky. As we came closer we saw more and more churches. Our hotel, the Ilmen, named after a romantic lake close by, commanded a lovely view of the Kremlin and the Cathedral of St Sophia. I had a hurried bath and, leaving Anujee to her evening prayers, went to sit on a bench in front of our hotel, casting my eyes on as great a feast of beauty as God and man had ever combined to spread.

At my feet was the river Volkhova. To my mind, saturated with the legends of *Sadko*, Volkhova was less a river than a woman. She was a goddess who, unable to be united with her mortal lover, Sadko, turned herself into a river and lies eternally athwart his home town, Novgorod. It was 8.30 now; and in the evening light Volkhova looked still and sweet and sad, the very picture of a love which is unfulfilled and yet unforgetting. There were two ducks on the bank, proud mothers, surrounded by their ducklings and coaxing them to come out of the river and go to bed. Here and there, a canoe was drifting and occasionally the

bosom of the Volkhova was agitated by the passage of an incongruous motor boat. On the opposite bank children were bathing and fishermen fishing. Above them were the red walls of the Kremlin, resembling the walls of the Red Fort of Delhi, built by Shahjahan. St Sophia's Cathedral, rising above those walls, also reminded me of Shahjahan. Lit by the last rays of the setting sun as well as the first beams of the rising moon, the domes of the Cathedral transported me to that monument of Shahjahan's love, the Taj Mahal in Agra. St Sophia's, even as the Taj, was a vision of beauty in white. Here, as in the Taj, was a central dome, surrounded by subsidiary domes. In both, the domes were of the bulbous type though St Sophia's are less swelling, less sensuous than those of the Taj. Both pay homage to love, one to the love of God, and the other to the love of woman, exceeding the love of God.

RELIGION AND ROMANCE

NOVGOROD was one of the most restful places we had visited in the Soviet Union. No factories defaced its precincts. No chimneys belching smoke defiled its air. There were no trams in Novgorod, and even the buses seemed few and far between. Fifteen minutes' walk took one right out into the country. There were few modern institutions and even the House of Pioneers looked somewhat shy by the side of the Church of St Nicholas, eight hundred years old. The citizens of Novgorod went about in a leisurely, contented manner. Anujee asked the directress of our hotel whether there were any industries in the town. 'No,' she replied. 'We are an ancient town. Our only industry is to be ancient and to remain ancient.' And sometimes I cannot help thinking that there is much to be said for this industry.

History tells us of many kings and queens who have been called, or have called themselves, Great. Among them are Peter the Great and Catherine the Great of Russia, Alfred the Great and Elizabeth the Great of England, Asoka the Great and Akbar the Great of India. But few towns have had the temerity to call

themselves Great. One is Novgorod. Gospodin Veliki Novgorod or Sir Novgorod the Great—that is how children in the old days were taught to call Novgorod.

The greatness of Novgorod lives on in its churches and cathedrals. The Yury Monastery was the first monument which we visited. I would have liked to visit the more famous St Sophia's Cathedral first, but it was a Monday and I was told that the museum attached to it, containing some of the most precious objects which used to be in the Cathedral, would be closed. In the Soviet Union museums and places of entertainment are generally open on Sundays, but closed on Mondays. Here the Sabbath is a day of rest and enjoyment; in other countries it is a day of rest and abstinence.

The Yury Monastery is situated on Lake Ilmen. Our guide pointed to an island in the middle of the lake in which excavations had been going on. Amongst the most interesting finds were the relics of the worship of Perun, the God of Thunder and Lightning. I wondered whether Perun had any affinity to the Hindu Varuna, the god of Rain. In 989 Novgorod was converted to Christianity despite the fierce resistance of the inhabitants. When eventually the idol of Perun was thrown into the lake it is said that the angry God threw back a sword at the people of Novgorod as an omen that there would be perpetual dissension among them. And the history of Novgorod was marred by many a feud, resulting in bloodshed.

The Yury Cathedral is a thousand years old. Our guide, who had a fine proletarian feeling, asked us to note that it had two stories: the upper story used to be reserved for the boyars or nobles, and the lower story for the common people. A steep flight of steps leads to the upper story; and our guide remarked that the gouty nobles of those days preferred to climb those difficult steps and pray from above rather than mix with the common crowd. This Cathedral and the surrounding churches have suffered greatly from German occupation. The dome of one of the churches was entirely denuded of its gilt covering, which was then used by the Germans to make cigarette cases. The highest chamber in the Cathedral was used by German soldiers as a watch-tower from which they were perpetually on the lookout. We saw some lovely frescoes which fortunately escaped their attention, but a German contribution to the artistic wealth of this

Cathedral remains in the series of sketches of buxom, amenable but ungainly women which decorate the walls

The churches in Novgorod have suffered not merely from the vandalism of the Germans, but from the misplaced piety of the rich. The parvenus of the nineteenth century, seeing little beauty in the frescoes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, had them plastered over and then covered them with paintings executed by hack artists. In some churches these garish pictures are being removed, and below them one can see the desecrated but still gracious frescoes of the Middle Ages.

The most famous patron of religion in Novgorod in the nineteenth century was a woman, Countess Orlova. Many of the modern paintings in the Yuri Monastery were done under her direction. Our guide related the strange story of this fabulous woman. Countess Orlova was as remarkable for her beauty as for her wealth. She is said to have owned some half a million serfs. She was engaged to be married to an officer of the army, but on the eve of the marriage, Father Photius, who had fallen in love with her, took her to an icon of Christ and said, 'There is your Bridegroom!' And thereafter, as Pushkin put it, she remained faithful to Christ in her spirit and to Photius in her body. Photius had friends in the highest quarters of the State, both civil and ecclesiastical. There was no honour in this world or, as she fancied, in the other, which would not be hers for the asking. After Father Photius died her ambition soared even higher. She desired to be the head of the Yuri Monastery. Unfortunately tradition forbade a woman to be the head of a monastery for men. What simpler, then, than to convert the monastery into a nunnery? And to the achievement of this object she now set her wits. Father Photius's successor, however, was opposed to her machinations and gave her some sacramental wine which made her ill. The next day she died and was hastily buried with pomp and ceremony, her funeral being attended by the highest dignitaries of the State. Many decades later, her grave as well as Father Photius's were opened. Father Photius looked as serene in death as in life. Orlova's face, however, had undergone a terrible transformation. There were signs of a struggle for life, her blouse was found torn, her mouth was twisted and there were scratches all over her body. Evidently she had been buried alive. And Father Photius's successor, said our guide, must have salved his conscience by

thinking that after all he did not kill her; he merely put her to sleep, it was others who buried her.

On our return we visited an old cemetery. It is the oldest cemetery I have visited and dates from the twelfth century. Originally it was meant exclusively for foreigners. The fact that a cemetery was set apart for foreigners confirms how great a centre for international trade Novgorod used to be. In the middle of the cemetery stands a church, known as the Peter and Paul church, where the mother of the great hero, Alexander Nevsky, was buried. This cemetery is not only the oldest but, if one may use that expression, the most delightful I have ever seen. It was full of old trees, silent spectators of the many vicissitudes through which Novgorod has gone. The interlacing branches of these trees blotted out the sun and protected us from the heat which was getting unbearable. In this sylvan grove we could hear the twittering of birds and, if Walter de la Mare were to come here, he would doubtless hear the gentle whisperings of ghosts as well.

Wherever we went we were surrounded by large crowds. Evidently we were the first Indians to visit Novgorod; and Anujee's saree, which seemed to have no beginning and no end, was an object of wonder. At first, the people looked at us with shy and uncomprehending eyes, but when they knew that we were Indians they became more friendly and communicative. On our way to the Yury Monastery a number of school girls from Countess Orlova's Institute greeted us. On emerging from the Monastery an hour later, we were pleasantly surprised to see these girls waiting for us with bouquets of wild flowers in their hands. An old woman told me that Malenkov had been in Novgorod the previous day and had addressed them. 'Won't you also say a few words to us?' she asked. Another old woman asked Valia what my profession was. 'He is the Ambassador of India to the Soviet Union,' Valia replied, hoping she would be duly impressed. 'Yes, yes,' she said impatiently, 'I know he is Ambassador, but what does he do?' A question which I often ask myself.

ICONS AND FRESCOES

NOWHERE have I seen more churches and cathedrals than in Novgorod. What impressed me was not merely the buildings themselves but, even more, the beauty of the icons and frescoes which they contained. I do not believe in the miracles of Christianity, and our Russian companion, Valia, a post-Revolution product, is openly contemptuous of them. Yet, when I looked at some of these icons with my profane twentieth-century eyes, I was moved to tears. On the face of the Virgin Mary, a perennial fountain of inspiration for artists, there is a look of compassion which seemed to affect even Valia. Again and again these icons have succoured not only men and women, but cities and kingdoms in the crises of their lives. The oldest and holiest of icons is that of a dark Virgin, about eighteen inches in height, which was painted in 1069. A miracle performed by this icon in the history of Novgorod is delineated in an elaborate series of frescoes, preserved in the Granovita Palace. The troops of Novgorod are locked in battle with the troops of Suzdal. Neither side being able to win a decisive victory, they start peace parleys. The Suzdal troops, while conducting negotiations, are preparing to resume the battle, and a Suzdal arrow strikes the Virgin's face. She becomes angry, the truce talks are broken off, the Novgorod troops plunge into battle and the Suzdalians are defeated.

These frescoes and icons of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have a striking resemblance to the Italian paintings of the Middle Ages. Yet there is a difference. The paintings of Fra Angelico move man to renunciation, Russian paintings move him to contemplation. The Italian's eyes are focused on the other world, Russian eyes are focused on this world as well as the other. The Italian paintings are idealistic, the Russian paintings are tinged with realism. For instance, in a fresco on the raising of Lazarus from death, a mourner is shown applying the edge of a robe to her nostrils, thereby suggesting that the body of Lazarus was already decomposed. The objects of nature and of everyday life were drawn by Russian artists exactly as they saw them. In drawing things which they had not seen, however,

they were at sea. The country around Novgorod is flat and the painters of Novgorod had never seen hills and mountains; they therefore represented them in their paintings with curious geometrical patterns.

One icon which particularly impressed me was that of a head of Christ, drawn by the famous painter Ushakov. There Christ's head is shown resting on a red towel. 'Why this towel?' I asked the director of the museum. He related a story regarding the genesis of this picture. For weeks and months Ushakov had been trying to visualize the face of Christ. He found it impossible to do so and was in despair. Great beads of perspiration broke out. Ushakov applied a towel to his face; and, lo and behold, it bore an imprint of the likeness of Christ, and all that he had to do was to reproduce it. In this picture, the eyes of Christ are full of a penetrating tenderness. They seem to rest on you from whichever direction you look at the picture. Such, said the director of the museum, are the eyes of God, which rest with equal impartiality on sinners and saints.

I, as an Easterner, was specially interested to observe the Eastern element in these paintings. Art is universal; and to try to dissect it into its geographical components is a poor pastime. Nevertheless critics, in their fondness for generalization, have regarded certain qualities as typically Eastern or typically Western. For instance, the art of Greece is characterized by balance, refinement, elegance and humanity. The art of India, on the other hand, has greater depth, intensity, a certain other-worldliness and, in Western eyes, an incongruous crudity. The paintings in Novgorod seemed to be a fine blend of both these sets of qualities.

Most of the painters of icons were anonymous. What spurred them to high artistic endeavour was not a hunger for fame, but the hope of salvation. Their aim was to glorify God, not to immortalize themselves. Yet the names of some of these painters have come down to us. One of the most famous among them was Theophanes the Greek. Before coming to Russia he had already made a name for himself as a painter in Byzantium. He spent forty years in and around Novgorod. We saw some of his paintings in the Church of Antoniev. The tall elongated figures of Adam, Abel, Elijah and Noah, so reminiscent of El Greco, are marked by a kind of primeval vigour and spiritual intensity.

Side by side with these attributes, they also reveal another quality, which has reached its supreme expression in the dance of Nataraja in India and the art of the ballet in Russia, rhythm

In the afternoon we went to the Historical Museum and saw some of the paintings of a later period, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They belong to a different world altogether. The religious emotion which was the mainspring of art in the Middle Ages had already declined. Moreover, Western influences had begun to creep, and sometimes to burst, into Russia. The goal of Peter the Great was to Westernize Russia, and he succeeded as well in the sphere of art as in politics. Icon-painting, which was beginning to die a natural death, was now killed once and for all. Thereafter no great or original school of painting has arisen in Russia. Amongst the paintings which we saw this afternoon were many which pleased the eye but did not stir the soul. It was like seeing Ravi Varma's pictures after the frescoes of Ajanta.

LENINGRAD

THE WHITE NIGHTS

WE reached Leningrad on 21 June 1954, after a tedious drive of about 200 kilometres from Novgorod. It was the season of the *byeli nochi*, that is 'white nights', or nights without darkness. We had our first experience of a white night on our return from the theatre after seeing *The Seven Beauties*, a ballet based on an Azerbaijan story of the fifth century, written by Nizami. *The Seven Beauties* began at 8 and went on till midnight. When we came out there were no street lights—and there was no need for them—and boys and girls were playing football on the deserted roads. A little later there was just a glimmer of darkness, soon dispelled by an unobtrusive dawn.

The white nights have thrown Anujee's daily programme of prayer into confusion. Her usual regimen is to pray for a couple of hours before dawn and a couple of hours after sunset. But what is she to do in Leningrad? Pray for four hours from midnight, when sunset and sunrise coincide? That would mean that she would have to do without sleep, for neither of us can stay in bed after 6 o'clock in the morning. She has now decided to pray at any odd hour, hoping that the Almighty, who after all created the sun and is responsible for its vagaries, would understand her difficulty and forgive her delinquency.

Last night was, or should have been, the whitest night of all. It was the 21st of June, the longest day of the year. We had planned to go out at midnight and see the dawn. Unfortunately, the sky became clouded and we thought there was no point in our going. I read a book and Anujee prayed for a couple of hours, leaving it to God to accept it as her morning or evening quota. At the end of her prayers she saw and heard batches of boys and girls, coming back from somewhere and singing away. Evidently, undeterred by the cloudy weather, they had been enjoying the white night. My sleep too was pleasantly interrupted by the singing of these all-night revellers. Kumar, however, did not like the noises in the street, aggravated by the blowing of motor

horns, in which the Leningrad drivers seemed to excel. He went to sleep with his windows and ventilators hermetically closed.

The next day's weather was worse. The heat was oppressive, it was the kind of damp heat which we never get in Moscow and always get in Malabar, and my sensitive back was beginning to react to it. In the evening there was a dust storm followed by rain. This did not last long but was strong enough to lay the dust. A little before midnight we went out for a stroll. We sat on a bench near the statue of Peter the Great. In front of us was the Neva, purposefully flowing towards the Gulf of Finland. Beyond gleamed the gilt spike of the Fortress of Peter and Paul. We sat there long in the hope of seeing the sunset and the sunrise. We saw neither. The only sign of sunrise was a faint pink glow which appeared on the face of the sky, like the blush which spreads over the cheeks of a school girl who is none too fair and is suddenly kissed by her teacher, whose affection she had enjoyed but whose love she had not suspected.

We returned to the Astoria in the small hours of the morning. The light was just the same as when we left, it was a kind of neutral light, hovering between light and darkness. Twenty-four hours of this light might be amusing for a few days and bearable for a few weeks but must be maddening if one has to put up with it longer. Such, I thought, must be the light in purgatory to which the neutral spirits of this world whose souls have never been stirred to high endeavour, whether good or bad are consigned after death.

SIGHT-SEEING

THE rise of St Petersburg often reminds me of the rise of Calcutta. Both sprang from a swamp in the eighteenth century. One is situated at the mouth of the Neva, the other at the mouth of the Hooghly. One faces the Gulf of Finland, the other the Bay of Bengal. One was the capital of the British Empire in India for less than two centuries, the other was the capital of the Tsarist Empire for a little longer. The capital of India was shifted to that ancient city, Delhi, in 1911, and the capital of Russia was shifted back to 'Holy Moscow' in 1917.



Nevsky Prospekt, Leningrad

P. N. Sharma

Yet there is a difference between Calcutta and St Petersburg. No one goes to Calcutta in search of great architecture. Tourists flock to India from all parts of the world to see her great monuments, but the places they visit are Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Udaipur, Bijapur, Tanjore and Madurai, not Calcutta. But no lover of architecture can afford to miss St Petersburg or, as it is now called, Leningrad.

We began our sight-seeing with a visit to the little cottage in which Peter lived from 1703 to 1708, supervising the construction of his city. The cottage consists of three rooms with wooden floors and wooden walls, made of local pine wood and covered with plaster. It was built by the soldiers who accompanied Peter to this spot on a shooting trip in the spring of 1703. It was then that Peter decided to open 'a window on Europe' and to make it the capital of Russia.

We saw a ballet, based on Pushkin's poem 'The Bronze Horseman', which shows the splendid rise of St Petersburg 'from the darkness of the forests, from the soft, watery marshes, proud and luxuriant'. It depicts the fate of two common individuals, Evgeny and Parasha, in St Petersburg. They are deeply in love with each other and their only desire is to live a simple, happy life together. All their dreams are ruined by a flood, which is most realistically shown on the stage. When the flood has abated, Evgeny goes in search of his beloved. She is missing; and her little house, in which he had courted her, has been washed away. Evgeny is stricken with sorrow. Suddenly he sees the statue of Peter the Great,

Who, motionless, aloft and dim,
Our city by the sea had founded,
Whose will was Fate. Appalling there
He sat begirt with mist and air.

Evgeny is seized by a wild impulse to make an assault on the statue. He

clenched his teeth
And clasped his hands, as though some devil
Possessed him, some dark power of evil,
And shuddered, whispering angrily,
'Ay, architect, with thy creation
Of marvels . . . Ah! beware of me!'

Hardly had he assaulted the statue when he felt that the Bronze Horseman was moving towards him And then 'in wild precipitation he fled' But the Horseman pursues him

He hears behind him as it were
Thunders that rattle in a chorus,
A gallop ponderous, sonorous
That shakes the pavement¹

Evgeny goes raving mad and dies

The ballet poses a fundamental problem, the relation between the State and the individual. How far is the State justified in sacrificing the lives and happiness of thousands of individuals for some purpose which it regards as the common good? Pushkin was too great an artist to answer this question Yet it is a problem which has troubled political philosophers from time immemorial

This problem continued to haunt us when we visited Russia's Bastille, the Fortress of Peter and Paul. Originally built as a fortress, it was used in subsequent years as a political prison. Its first victim was Alexis, Peter the Great's own son, who had become the focus of opposition to his reforms Among its occupants were the leaders of the Decembrist movement, culprits involved in the attempt to assassinate Tsar Alexander II, including Alexander Ulyanov, the elder brother of Lenin, and the revolutionaries who took part in the rising of 1905 On 22 January 1905 a deputation of the workers of St Petersburg, led by Father Gapon and preceded by the sacred images, went to the Winter Palace to meet the Tsar and was mercilessly shot down. The rising of 1905 was a precursor of the Revolution of 1917 The Tsar, however, did not hear the note of doom His diary for 22 January reads

* Pretty doings! Was busy until dinner and all evening Went boating in a canoe. Got dressed and rode a bicycle to the bathing beach and bathed enjoyably in the sea. The weather was wonderful

The most imposing monument in the Fortress of Peter and Paul is the Cathedral, built by Peter, with a gilt spike which was

¹ Oliver Elton's translation, quoted from Janko Lavrin's *Pushkin and Russian Literature* (Hodder & Stoughton)

the tallest in Russia for many decades. The Tsars used to be buried in this Cathedral. Unfortunately we were unable to visit the imperial tombs as we were told that the Cathedral was undergoing repairs. Why the Emperors of Russia should have chosen, as their eternal resting place, a spot so near the abode of their victims, many of whom had been tortured to death, it is difficult to say. Anyhow, it showed that the Tsars died with a clear conscience. None believed more fervently in 'the right divine of kings to govern wrong'. One is reminded of a conversation which took place between the last of the Tsars during the last year of his reign and the British Ambassador in St Petersburg, Sir George Buchanan. 'Your Majesty', admonished Sir George, 'should try and deserve the confidence of your people.' 'Is it not rather for My people,' replied the Tsar, 'to deserve My confidence?'

One of our most interesting visits in Leningrad was to Pushkin's home. It is a seven-roomed apartment, overlooking the Moika Canal, where Pushkin spent the last few months of his life. After the Revolution the house was restored to its original condition. In particular, Pushkin's study has been restored with meticulous care. We were shown the divan on which Pushkin used to recline and compose his poems, and the Dutch chest in which he used to keep his poems, and his Abyssinian grandfather, Hannibal, used to keep his wife's jewels. We also saw Pushkin's library of 4500 books in 14 languages, of which he could read six with ease and the others with the help of a dictionary. On his writing table we saw his quill pen, oil lamp, ink stand, seal, scissors and call-bell. We were also shown the last book which he had been reading before he left for the fateful duel in which he lost his life, a children's book of fairy tales. In the adjoining room there is a small glass case, containing a lock of Pushkin's hair. The Russians look at it with as much veneration as the devotees of Buddha look at Buddha's relic in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy. In the adoration of the great in Russia there is an element of idolatry.

When our guide related to us the details of the duel in which Pushkin died at the early age of 38 there were tears in her eyes. Though she must be relating this story day after day and many times a day to groups of visitors, her grief at the death of Pushkin seemed to well up ever fresh. The Russians are a sentimental people.

We also visited the world-famous palaces, museums and churches in Leningrad—the Winter Palace, beautiful in green and white, containing the Hermitage, which has a million *objets d'art* from Palaeolithic times to Picasso, arranged in 600 rooms, the Summer Palace, an immense structure on a cliff, overlooking the Gulf of Finland, which was described by a foreign traveller as 'the love-sick dream of a giant, told by a mad poet', St Isaac's Cathedral, with its great black dome, from which Pushkin saw and wrote of a beautiful sunrise over the Neva, the Church of the Resurrection, with its brilliant mosaics, warm and gay, like St Basil's in Moscow, and the solemn Kazan Cathedral where Prince Youssoupoff prayed for two hours before he set out, on the night of 29 December 1916, to decoy Rasputin to his house on the Moika Canal and murder him there. Anujee, too, wanted to pray in Kazan Cathedral, as it was Ekadasi and Aswathi, Kumar's birth star, but was unable to do so as it has been turned into a museum of the History of Religion. All the acts of inhumanity perpetrated in the name of religion are shown in this museum in the readily assimilable, and very attractive, form of pictures and illustrations.

Our guide showed us the scenes and objects connected with the Revolution of 1917 with greater zest than the monuments of Tsarist Russia. We saw the Finland Station, where Lenin arrived on 16 April 1917 in a sealed carriage from Switzerland, the armoured car from which he first proclaimed the coming victory of the proletariat, the balcony of Ksheshinskaya, a famous ballerina and the Tsar's mistress, from which Lenin gave *darshan* to a vast concourse of people who had assembled to welcome him, the Smolny Institute from which he directed the October Revolution, and the cruiser *Aurora* from which the first shots of the Revolution were fired.

The most interesting building of the post-Revolution period is a stadium, projected by Kirov, whose assassination let loose the terrible purges of the thirties. The stadium is situated on an artificial hillock on a promontory where the Neva falls into the Gulf of Finland. From this hillock we obtained a lovely view of Leningrad, with its churches and towers and steeples. A few furlongs away lay the Gulf of the Thousand Lakes, on which we could see ships, canoes, rowing boats and boats with their white sails gleaming in the sun. Our minds were diverted from the enjoyment of this scene of infinite beauty by our Intourist guide

who said that the stadium could contain 80,000 people sitting or 100,000 standing; that the benches in the stadium, laid end to end, would cover a length of 32 kilometres; and that so many tons of mud had to be taken out and so many tons of sand had to be put in. She used these figures to impress us with the Herculean character of the project conceived by Kirov and completed by the Soviet Government. How much grander was the vision, I thought, and how much more Herculean the work of Peter the Great, who conceived and carried out the construction of a whole city in this swampy region! Just as the Delhi of today is also the Delhi of Shahjahan, so the City of Lenin will remain the City of Peter.

LENINGRAD IN WINTER

WE went again to Leningrad in February 1956 at the invitation of the Chamber of Commerce, to open the Indian Handicrafts Exhibition. When we were here last, it was the height of summer, the season of white nights. I still remember the joy with which I, a native of Kerala, where the sun has no irregular habits but rises punctually at 6 a.m. and sets punctually at 6 p.m., found myself in a place where the sun did not seem to set at all and the days seemed endless. Even in February, the days and nights in Leningrad were very much alike, but that was not because the sun did not set but because it seemed unable to rise at all. We were in a region of perpetual twilight. When visible, the sun looked like some spent Don Juan, whose

... days have crackled and gone up in smoke,
Have puffed and burst as sun-starts on a stream.

If the days were not bright, nor were the nights dark. Even though we were advancing towards new moon, the vast whiteness of the snow lent an eerie pallor to the scene. The night in Leningrad looked like an albino as compared with the pitch-dark nights in India which have something of the quality of coal-black eyes which sweep you into their depths.

In 1956 the cold was intense. On the day we arrived it was 31 degrees below zero; the next day it was 35 below; and soon it fell

to 40 Not since 1939 had Russia experienced such a winter. When people met, the conversation was invariably about the cold. However, it was a healthy sign that the cold, rather than the cold war, was the favourite subject of conversation, though there were signs that the cold war was returning and the Geneva spirit was receding

The people of the USSR are less interested in politics than in climate and culture Politics they are content to leave to the Party, but climate they cannot escape, and culture provides them with a way of escape from the hard realities of life In their search for culture they are prepared to defy even the rigours of their climate I realized how tough the Russians were when I saw a long queue of men and women, waiting in the open, in a temperature 35 degrees below freezing point, for admission to the exhibition of Indian handicrafts In three days, no less than 18,000 persons visited the exhibition

On Sunday we saw groups of workmen going to the Hermitage and heard a guide explaining to them how the medieval picture, 'The Holy Family', had nothing holy about it, the artist's treatment of the subject was so human There were throngs of people in the Russian Museum, and a guide was explaining to them that realism had been the keynote of Russian art from time immemorial Even the treatment of saints in the icons of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was realistic, the saints were but benevolent individuals who helped the peasants, shepherds and merchants in their everyday life A fanciful explanation, I thought, for it hardly suited the tall, gaunt, austere, ascetic men who stared at us with other worldly eyes from those icons and frescoes In the Russian paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, realism was indeed the dominant note We saw ordinary men and women, soldiers and civilians, being visibly moved by such paintings as Kosolop's 'Mad Violinist', depicting a man playing the violin beside his deceased wife, Kransky's 'Deep Sorrow', in which he shows his own wife, desolate after the death of her son, Zhuravlev's picture of a reluctant bride being forced by her poor parents to marry a rich noble, Markovsky's scene of a crowd of homeless people, struggling to buy a little space as their lodging for the night, and Repin's 'Volga Boatmen', bent with toil and dripping with sweat, dragging a barge against the current on the swift flowing Volga From such pictures the Russians

must have gone home not only with a sense of their beauty and power, but with a sense of their own liberation from the social and economic hardships of the pre-Revolution period. This feeling must have been heightened if they went, as we did last night, to some such play as Vishnevsky's *Optimistic Tragedy*, full of blood and thunder, showing an early revolutionary episode in which the communists had to struggle against anarchists, counter-revolutionaries and other pests of society. Or the citizens of Leningrad would escape from it all, as we did, by going to the ballet *Don Quixote*, and seeing Dudinskaya dance—Dudinskaya, all bone and muscle, with not an ounce of superfluous flesh to distract attention from her arms and legs, executing the most difficult movements with an ease, grace and vigour which drew bursts of 'Bravos!' from an enchanted audience. Then indeed the people would feel that they were in another world, free from blood and sweat, toil and tears, a world where there was no propaganda but only music, no acting but only dancing, and no discord but only harmony.

STALINGRAD

A JOURNEY BY TRAIN

ANUJEE says that I am again suffering from an attack of *wanderlust*. She thinks it comes on badly once in ten years. This time ten years ago I was planning my trip on horseback and on foot from India to China, across the mountains of Central Asia, and ten years previously I was cruising on Lake Victoria, driving over the Serengeti plains and riding in the Rift Valley, where Mau Mau had not yet been heard of. Now, *wanderlust* comes to me in more genteel forms appropriate to my age and spine. We spent the month of May mostly in Poland, and June mostly in Leningrad. Hardly had we returned to Moscow when I heard that an Indian Railway delegation, which came here at the invitation of the Soviet Government, was proceeding to Stalingrad and the Volga Don Canal. I decided to accompany them by train.

The first time I travelled by train in the Soviet Union was from Sochi to Moscow in November 1953. Until then I used to think that Indian trains were slow. But the Russian trains are slower still. The distance from Sochi to Moscow is about the same as the distance from Calcutta to Bombay. One can travel from Calcutta to Bombay in about forty hours, while the journey from Sochi to Moscow took over fifty. Even the pride of Russia the Red Arrow, which runs between Moscow and Leningrad, is not so fast as our Deccan Queen or the Frontier Mail.

The railway has a large number of female functionaries. The guard of our train was a formidable-looking woman who, I thought, would somehow use the red flag more than the green. Later she was replaced by a younger and more attractive woman, who was conscious of her charm and did not disdain cosmetics. Ours was the last compartment in the train, next to the guard's van and whenever we passed through the corridor, we could see her admiring herself in the mirror, polishing her nails or reviving her lipstick. Fitzroy Maclean, the author of *Eastern*

Approaches, has a curious theory as to why the Soviet Government now permit the use of lipstick, red nails, etc. He thinks that they regard them as aphrodisiacs and encourage their use in the hope that they will put up the birth-rate and increase the nation's war potential. Tastes differ; and plucked eyebrows and scarlet lips excite in me repulsion and not desire. Indian women seldom use such artificial aids to beauty, and yet there is no decrease in our birth-rate. On the contrary, Paris, the centre of beauty culture, seems unable to put it up.

A journey by train in Russia is more expensive than a journey by air, if one travels in the highest class. There are as many classes in Russian trains as in India and more than in England. The primary distinction is between soft and hard classes. The hard class is very hard indeed. It consists of three planks, placed one on top of another. The soft class is divided into I and II and generally consists of four-berth compartments. Above all there is a super-first class, called *International*, which consists of two-berth compartments. In trains, at any rate, there are more class distinctions in proletarian Russia than in capitalist England.

This time we travelled in a saloon which the railway authorities had put at our disposal. It had no fans; fans are a rarity in the Soviet Union. My *de luxe* carriage was covered with lovely carpets. They were spread not only on the floor but on the walls as well, which made the room uncomfortably hot. The windows had been hermetically closed and fastened down. However, we got our cook, who was a mechanic, to open the windows. Then Tania, our amiable interpreter, turned to us and asked whether we would not catch cold!

We did not catch a cold but we caught the heat even more after the opening of the windows, because the wind was hot. The heat was so overpowering, and the glare so unbearable, that all I could do was to pull the curtains together and go to bed. My companions, Vasist, Sahay and Sandilya, were braver; they remained in the sitting room and played dominoes, a game they had learned from our Russian friends. They played a match, India versus the Soviet Union, defeated the Russians and won the bet, a bottle of champagne.

The journey to Stalingrad was very different from our journey to Leningrad. On the way to Leningrad we hardly saw any

cultivation All was forest and marsh On the way to Stalingrad the forests were interspersed with fields and eventually gave way to them Sometimes for miles together one saw nothing but a vast expanse of wheat, the collective majesty of which was unimpaired by such capitalist relics as strips and hedges The earth was of a rich, black colour, black like the bulging breasts of the Indian goddess of fertility in Sanchi, whose potency man could explore for a thousand years I felt that, like the soil of the Deccan, nature had destined the soil here for the cultivation of cotton, but the Soviet man has decided that cotton shall be grown in Central Asia and wheat in South Russia

The journey from Moscow to Stalingrad was slow We covered a thousand kilometres in 36 hours Thus the average speed of the train was rather less than 20 miles an hour The train seemed to be in no hurry It lingered at wayside stations, and we saw thirsty men, women and children rushing to the cold water pipes, washing their hands and faces and their bare bodies, wetting their clothes, and drinking from under the pipe with their mouths upside down We passed a number of interesting places—Kashira, an old and historic town; Michurinsk, formerly Koslov, now named after Michurin, the great scientist, and Pavlov, where a great tank battle was fought during the war Finally, at about 9 p.m., when the sun was hesitating whether to go to rest or not, the train moved slowly into Stalingrad to the accompaniment of loud speakers noisily playing the heroic tunes composed during Stalingrad's finest hour, its defence against the German onslaught in the winter of 1942

The representatives of the Railway Administration and the City Council took us to a hotel which had been badly damaged during the war While we were sitting there, discussing the programme for sight seeing in Stalingrad, a telegram was handed to me, announcing that a daughter was born to Malin yesterday I told my friends that my ninth grandchild had just arrived, and they all drank to its health I then discovered that I had made an arithmetical mistake, it was not my ninth grandchild, but the tenth This gave my hosts an excuse for another drink and another toast 'May she be as noted for her beauty as Stalingrad is for heroism!'

STALINGRAD

OUR stay in Stalingrad was a tantalizing experience. We could spend only one day there and it was so hot that we could hardly sleep at night or go out in the afternoon. Nevertheless, we set out early and obtained a bird's-eye view from a hillock. Stalingrad lay like a plantain leaf on the banks of the Volga, but we were unable to explore more than a fringe of it. We felt like hungry men before whom was spread a sumptuous feast which they had to gobble up in five minutes.

If I chose the wrong day to visit Stalingrad, I also seem to have chosen the wrong company. My companions, Vasist, Sahay and Sandilya, were delightful, but they never forgot that they were a Railway delegation; they were too conscientious to indulge in sight-seeing for the sake of sight-seeing. Wherever they went, the railways engrossed their attention. They were more interested in the railway station than in the battle of Stalingrad; the movement of armies interested them less than the movement of trains. Of the four or five hours of active sight-seeing, we spent two or three in the railway station. At once commodious and impressive, it has just been completed. Of the many amenities provided what impressed me most was the fact that separate rooms had been reserved for expectant women, women with babies in arms, and with older children.

Soon after an enormous breakfast we drove out to the top of a little hill, named after Mamai, the dreaded Tartar Khan of the fourteenth century. It was from here that Stalingrad looked like a plantain leaf on the banks of the Volga. Not a green but a drying leaf, for the city, with its newly built houses, jostling against half-ruined buildings, looked yellow in the scorching sun. It was a strangely shaped city for, with a width of only two or three kilometres, it straggled for forty kilometres along the banks of the river. Here the irresistible German advance was halted and the myth of German invincibility was broken.

Our guide gave us a full account of the siege of Stalingrad. It sounded as if she was reciting it all from a history book: She described how, in May and June 1942, Hitler launched a tremendous offensive for the Volga and the Caucasus; how, in July 1942,

Sevastopol was taken after house-to-house fighting, how the German armies passed Azov and rushed into the foot-hills of the Caucasus, how Rostov was outflanked and the Don was crossed at the point where it came closest to the Volga, how the Germans, with their sheer numerical and mechanical superiority, reached the outskirts of Stalingrad, how Generals Zhukov and Vasilevsky planned a war of manoeuvre which sealed the fate of the 4th and the 6th German Armies, how, in November, when the Russian armies in Stalingrad had been hard-pressed, Rokossovsky moved from the north, chiefly at night, down the Don, towards Kalach, due west of Stalingrad, and Yeremenkov moved from the south, how jubilantly the two armies met, how, on the 10th of December, the German forces under Mannstein came up but were driven back by Yeremenkov, how, on the 8th of January 1943, an ultimatum was sent to von Paulus, commanding the German army, but was rejected by him, and how the final surrender of the Germans, together with their twenty-four Generals, took place on the 2nd of February. Our guide gave a vivid description of the last act in this memorable drama. When a Russian emissary went into his headquarters, von Paulus was sitting holding a revolver which bore the inscription 'From Hitler to Paulus'. He would not believe that he had been defeated. Then the twenty four German Generals were made to march before him; and the terrible truth that he had been beaten dawned on him. The first words which he uttered were 'Take me away from here to any place whence I cannot see the ruins of the city'—a city he had so utterly destroyed. The destruction of the city had begun at 4 p.m. on the 25th of August 1942, with a 48 hour continuous bombardment from the air. That bombardment set the town on fire, and, by the beginning of 1943, 85 per cent of Stalingrad had been destroyed. 147,000 German corpses were found, and 48,000 Russians were dead.

Our guide related many stories of Russian heroism. Most heroic of all was a sergeant called Pavlov, who defended his outpost against the numerically superior Germans for 58 days. His house, only 300 yards from the Volga, marked the farthest point to which the Germans advanced. We saw it, a grimacing ruin amidst the many new buildings springing up all around it. On its walls we saw the words, written in blood by Pavlov's men 'We will hold on unto death.'

While our guide was relating these incidents, we picked up empty cartridge cases and bits of shrapnel which still covered the hill of Mamai.

Thirty-five years ago Stalingrad, then Tsaritsyn, played an almost equally decisive part in saving Russia. The Revolution had just taken place, but Russia was almost choked to death by the counter-revolutionaries, aided by foreign powers. If Tsaritsyn had fallen, communication between Moscow and the South would have been cut off and the Caucasus, Russia's granary, would have been lost. But Tsaritsyn did not fall, thanks largely to the determination of one man, who was then a comparatively obscure figure, but who was to dominate Russia for the next three decades, Stalin. 'Rest assured,' he telegraphed to Lenin, 'our hands will not tremble.' Those hands saved Tsaritsyn; and the city of Catherine became the city of Stalin. Nothing is heard nowadays of another great figure who saved Russia from defeat, Trotsky, the founder of the Red Army.

Stalingrad is now being reconstructed on a scale worthy of its heroism. Through the centre of the city runs Stalin Prospekt, a highway 30 miles long and 90 yards wide. Intercepting it runs the Avenue of Heroes, 400 feet wide, from the railway station to the Volga. Many stately buildings are rising, such as the Gorky Theatre, the Victory Cinema, the Palace of the Soviets, the Palace of Labour and Institutes of Engineering and Forestry. A planetarium, of which the entire equipment was presented to Stalin on his 70th birthday by the German Democratic Republic, has been nearly completed. Most striking of all is the Temple of Glory in which are kept the relics of the Battle of Stalingrad. Among them is the sword which was presented to Stalin by King George VI as a token of his respect and admiration for the defence of the city. Roosevelt has recorded that Stalin was so overwhelmed by this gift that he kissed the sword with tears in his eyes.

THE VOLGA-DON CANAL

At 6 o'clock on 10 July 1954 we left Stalingrad for Rostov. Our ship was called the *Rosa Luxembourg*, after the famous German revolutionary of that name. There was another ship in the harbour, a floating sanatorium, which was being used to take people

out on fortnightly cruises and give them rest and treatment. On the deck of that ship we saw a portly, middle-aged individual, who was being taught physical exercises by an instructress who was young enough to be his daughter, ingratiating enough to be his mistress and masterful enough to be his wife.

Soon after we left Stalingrad a gentle breeze sprang up, cooling our perspiring bodies—for the temperature had been over 100°F.—and curling the Volga into ripples of laughter. Three weeks ago we were near the source of the Volga, and now we saw it flowing brimfully and majestically towards its goal in the Caspian, with the serene air of a philosopher who is about to attain the Infinite. There also appeared a rainbow in the sky, which was perfectly reflected in the river. It looked like the sash of some Order of the Sky, which the Architect of the Universe had conferred on the Volga for its meritorious services to humanity.

Suddenly a change came over this scene of almost unearthly beauty. The rainbow proved to be a portent. The gentle breeze was no longer gentle, it gathered force and became a furious wind, lashing the river into foaming billows. Clouds, no bigger than a man's hand, appeared in the west, overspreading the skies. And great drops of rain beat like slanting arrows on the passengers on the deck and sent them scurrying into their cabins. But the storm subsided as quickly as it arose, and there stood before us a mighty statue, so colossal in its dimensions, so powerful and so self-assured, that it looked as if it could let loose, or bring under control, even the forces of nature. That was the statue of Stalin. The statue of de Lesseps at the entrance to the Suez Canal is that of the engineer who built it, the statue of Stalin at the entrance to the Volga-Don Canal is meant to show a master-mind, at whose bidding the Volga agreed to flow meekly into the Don.

Two hundred and fifty years ago there lived another master-mind who dreamt a similar dream. Peter the Great also wanted to unite the Volga with the Don, but at that time science was not sufficiently advanced. The project was taken up by the Soviet Government before the war but was interrupted by the German invasion. Work was resumed at the end of 1950 and completed in the middle of 1952. On the 1st of June 1952 the builders of the canal reported in a letter to Stalin, 'The waters of the two great Russian rivers, the Volga and the Don, met on 31 May, at 13 55 hours.'

This project involved the construction of a navigation canal 101 kilometres long, a number of irrigation canals, a hydro-electric system together with an earth dam 12.75 kilometres long, and new roads and railway lines. It has been claimed with pride that it was completed in 3 years whereas the Panama Canal, which involved about the same volume of excavation work, took nearly 30 years to build. By the construction of the Volga-Don Canal, the White, the Baltic, the Black, the Caspian and the Azov Seas have been united into a single water-transport system; and Moscow has become a Port of Five Seas.

It was no easy task to connect the Volga with the Don. The difficulty was that the Don flowed at a higher level than the Volga, 44 metres higher. And the intervening land was even higher; it rose 88 metres above the Volga. What the engineers had to do was to make the river Volga flow upwards and then downwards into the Don.

I had read that this was accomplished by the construction of a number of locks, but I must confess that until I saw these locks I could not visualize them. Soon after we had passed Stalin's statue, we saw two iron gates, a hundred tons in weight, opening respectfully sideways. We then entered a short and narrow stretch of water, with walls 40 feet high on both sides. It gave us an eerie feeling to be in this watery cubicle. We felt like prisoners kept in some underground cell, or like passengers in a doomed ship, which was being offered as a sacrifice to some subterranean deity, or like animals confined in a pit, lest they should jump out into the open. We then saw the gates in front being raised slightly so as to let the water in. The water came, at first gently and noiselessly, and afterwards with a deafening uproar. With the influx of water, the ship started rising until, in a few minutes, we reached the top of that watery chamber. Then we could see the setting sun and the rising moon; we could once more breathe God's own air, so different from the stagnant air at the bottom of the lock. The gates in front then opened and we sailed out into the canal. The whole operation was dexterously performed in no more than fifteen minutes.

During the first three hours, we passed through a succession of locks. We kept on going in and out of these locks as Jawaharlal Nehru, in the first twenty-five years of his active life, used to go in and out of political prisons. By dinner time we had gone

through half a dozen locks and risen some 200 feet above the Volga. We were in high spirits, and it was not until after midnight that we went to sleep.

At 3 in the morning I woke up and found that the sun was already rising. There was magic in the morning twilight and I strolled on to the deck in my pyjamas. The whole world seemed asleep, except for two oldish men, who had been fishing. Had they just got up? I wondered, or had they been fishing all night? All my fellow passengers were asleep. The night was so hot that they slept with windows open and curtains drawn. How ungainly human beings look when they are asleep! One man was sleeping in shorts, with his legs thrust out of the window. A woman was asleep with mountains of flesh floating over her. In another cabin a woman was snoring away, and her husband was sleeping peacefully as if his wife's snore was music in his ears. I walked round the deck and found three persons asleep in deck chairs. One of them had curled himself up in such a way that he looked like a child in the womb. A woman who painted and powdered seemed attractive during the day, looked ghastly and cadaverous in sleep. A sixteen year-old boy was sleeping comfortably on a deck chair. He reminded me of Lucius in *Julius Caesar*, and I felt like waking him up, saying

Boy! Lucius! Fast asleep? It is no matter,
Enjoy the honey heavy dew of slumber
Thou hast no figures nor no fantasies
Which busy care draws in the brains of men,
Therefore thou sleep'st so sound

Presently we entered yet another lock, different from those we had passed through before dinner. Now the ship, instead of rising, began to sink. This was effected by a process the reverse of what we had seen before: water was now being let out of the lock instead of into it.

While I was watching this a middle aged woman in uniform joined me and set about arranging the deck chairs. I took her to be a stewardess, but the next evening the Captain of the ship, who dined with us, told us that she was the Vice-Captain. When I told my companions of my experience, Vasist, the leader of the

Indian Railway delegation, said that he was going to get up at 3 o'clock that night. But, said the Captain with a twinkle in his eyes, her husband was on board. What was worse, they were on their honeymoon. Lest they should be separated during the first year of their marriage, the authorities had considerably arranged to give him a small job on the ship.

I strolled up and down the deck for an hour or two. By 5.30 the sun was high above the horizon and the day was beginning to be hot. Nevertheless there was no sign of life on board. I myself returned to my cabin and again went to sleep. When I woke up we were no longer in a canal but seemed to be on the sea. And a sea the Russians call it, the Tsimlyanskoe sea. It is a large expanse of water formed by the construction of a dam on the Don. All day long we sailed on this 'sea'.

The passengers on the ship formed a motley crowd—soldiers, sailors, civil servants, peasants, workers and a pathetic little group of some 35 men who were deaf and dumb. These men, however, did not consider themselves pathetic. There was no lack of conversation among them. They chattered away among themselves, not with their tongues but with signs and gestures. They seemed to have a language of their own. They were being taken on a holiday cruise by a kind old woman, who had been the head of an institution for the deaf and dumb for four decades.

The most arresting figure on board was a Cossack girl. What made her so arresting was her dark complexion, darker even than ours. Naturally dark, she told us that she had been trying to make her skin still darker by using creams and lying about in the sun. In her dark face was set a pair of blue-grey eyes, which gave her a look of singular piquancy. Alive in every limb, she moved about the ship as if she owned it. And many doubtless would have liked to own her.

At about 9 in the evening, the sun, flattened out by its long journey, went down and an oval moon rose in the sky. The stars too began to appear one after another. As if to put them in the shade, a thousand lights began to twinkle in the distance. They were from the Tsimlyanskoe hydro-electric system. Captain Kuligan, who joined us for dinner, explained to us that it was a multipurpose project which regulated the river, facilitated navigation, provided irrigation, promoted cultivation and produced electricity.

At about midnight we crossed two more locks. We thus descended another 60 feet and came down to the level of the Don, which was still 44 metres above the level of the Volga.

We were now out of the 'sea' and on the river. The Don was a sluggish river and its occasional tendency to exuberance has been curbed by the construction of the Tsimlanskoe dam. The Don did not run in a straight line, it would meander to the right or to the left, like a man with a lazy mind who harbours no convictions and browses over all philosophies. However, as such men usually are, the Don too was very friendly. Cattle were grazing on its banks, men were bathing and children were playing in the Pioneer Camps established for the summer. I lay about in a deck chair and read Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*. Very quietly indeed did the Don flow. It was difficult to imagine that on its banks used to live a virile and violent people, whose loves and lusts, feuds and factions, are so skilfully portrayed by Sholokhov. Their private adventures have now given way to public order and are only remembered by readers of fiction.

On the evening of the 12th at 9 o'clock we reached our destination, Rostov. Here my Indian companions and I parted company. They were going on to Sochi by train and I was to fly back to Moscow. I put my baggage in a taxi and was on the point of leaving for the airfield when Mme Yakovleva, the Vice-Chairman of the City Executive Committee, arrived panting, pulled my things out of the taxi, put them in her own car, and whisked me away to the airfield. There she purchased my tickets, treated me to an excellent dinner and booked a room for me in the retiring rooms. I did not know what to admire more, her kindness, her hospitality, her charm or her boundless energy. In Russia, woman is the equal of man in every walk of life. It is man who is lagging behind, for there is one function which is still beyond him: he cannot bear children.

MAMAI HILL

WE visited Stalingrad again in the spring of 1956. It was the height of summer when we came here last. Then hot winds were blowing from the Karakum desert and the steppes of Kazakhstan. The glare was terrible. The war had denuded Stalingrad

not only of its buildings but of its trees. Now the authorities who are building a new Stalingrad, worthy of the heroism of the old, are taking special care to plant trees everywhere. The trees are taller than when we came here last; and the green belts between the different districts are greener. In four or five years Stalingrad will be a greener city than ever before, because an enormous hydro-electric dam, and a reservoir to be called 'the Stalingrad Sea', are to be constructed here. This dam is to be even bigger than the one at Kuibyshev on the middle Volga; and a number of irrigation channels will branch off in all directions from the Stalingrad Sea. At this rate the Volga will soon cease to be a river and will become a chain of 'seas', linked together by a canal.

We saw the usual sights in Stalingrad and ended up on the historic Mamai Hill. We struck a perfect day. It was one of those rare days on which man cannot complain of the weather: neither hot nor cold, damp nor dry, windy nor windless. It was a typical spring day when a young man's fancy 'lightly turns to thoughts of love'. Vishnu's thoughts were preoccupied with his love for Amina. And appropriately he went last night to see a Spanish film, 'It is no fun to be in love'.

The Mamai Hill is at last beginning to look more like a park than a battlefield. Here too trees are being planted and lawns are being laid out. This would have been impossible earlier, because on this hill the Russian and German armies had frequently clashed and it had been thoroughly blasted. Even though 13 years have passed after this event, Kumar, who is becoming quite an expert in military strategy, picked up a number of cartridges, a hand grenade and a buckle from some unfortunate soldier's belt.

We went to a corner of the park where there was a monument in honour of fallen heroes, with an inscription: 'Here took place one of the stormiest and bloodiest battles in the war.' Our guide went on to explain how stormy and how bloody that battle was. More eloquent than his commentary was the sight of a woman in black, with a handkerchief to her eyes, looking intently at the monument and moving quietly away as we approached it.

We also went to another corner of Mamai Hill where there was another monument commemorating the meeting of the Don army with the Stalingrad army on 26 January 1943. Great was the rejoicing in the Russian camp on that occasion. It spelt the

doom of Hitler's armies in Stalingrad and marked a turning-point in the war. This monument is crowned by a tank, the first to enter Stalingrad from the direction of the Don.

We also saw a film on the defence of Stalingrad. It was very different from the film on the same subject which was shown in Delhi at the Soviet Embassy in 1949. There, Stalin was shown as the prime organizer of victory. Here, Stalin does not appear at all. Full credit is given to the brilliance of the General Staff and the heroism of the common man. Our guide explained how 330,000 German soldiers, hardened in the battles of Western Europe, had taken part in the battle of Stalingrad, how 90,000 soldiers, including 24 Generals and 5000 officers, had been taken prisoner, and how the bodies of 147,000 Germans were picked up after the battle and burned in a heap. The film on the defence of Stalingrad showed not merely the grandeur of the battle but its ghastliness and the pity of it all. Our ancient epic poets, bewildered at the phenomenon of recurring wars among men, sought to explain it by saying that from time to time the long-suffering Earth would go to Brahma, the creator, and complain of the heavy load of humanity she had to carry. Then Brahma, taking pity on her, would send someone, a benefactor or a malefactor, to ease her burden. Hitler was one such, but he lacked even the grandeur of an epic wrong-doer like Ravana or Kamsa.



THE UKRAINE, MOLDAVIA AND THE CRIMEA

THE HOUSE OF TURGENEV

FOR once the weather prophets were right: they had forecast that this year the summer would be bad and the autumn good. The summer could not have been worse. The other half of the forecast also came true, for autumn opened on 1 September with glorious sunshine. No longer was Nature shedding tears of rain or gnashing her teeth in thunder as she had been doing throughout July and August. Now she behaved like a nun who, having been pursued by the Hound of Heaven for years, suddenly decided to resist him once and for all and give herself up to the world in all her finery.

It was on such a day that we set out on the longest car trip we have undertaken in the Soviet Union. During this trip we covered a good bit of Central Russia, the Ukraine, Moldavia and the Crimea. On leaving Moscow we saw the usual north Russian scenery for the first 200 kilometres. On both sides of the road were woods of birch, occasionally variegated by clumps of oak. The younger birch trees were already changing colour, but the oak remained unaffected, thus earning its name of winter oak. Wherever there were fields, we saw winter wheat being sown, so called because the wheat now sown will remain under snow throughout the winter and be ready for harvest in the summer.

The 1st of September marks not only the beginning of autumn but the opening of the school year. We saw hundreds of school children in brand new or well-ironed uniforms, going to school, some merrily, others gloomily, grumbling why the school could not have opened two days later on a Monday instead of on a Saturday. We also saw a number of road-signs and posters, many of which were addressed to the 'Voditeli' or drivers. Anujee, who is becoming an expert not merely in colloquial Russian but in Russian etymology, told us that *voditeli* came from *voda* or water, indicating that the earliest drivers of vehicles in Russia

were those who plied barges on the great water routes of the Volga, the Dnieper and the Don, along which flowed the earliest Russian civilization

Some 200 kilometres from Moscow, we reached Tula, a town with a population of over 300 000. For centuries it has been noted for the manufacture of arms and ammunition. Valia told us the life story of one Dimidoff who rose from blacksmith to boyar and eventually to prince. She told us how Peter the Great had sent him a gun of foreign make to be repaired, how skilfully he not only repaired it but made an exactly similar gun, how Peter the Great thereupon set about making guns and ammunition in Russia itself instead of importing them at enormous expense, how the Tsar leased him lands and mines in Siberia and asked him to develop them, how Dimidoff discovered a gold-mine in Siberia and started making counterfeit coins without the knowledge of the Tsar, how cruelly he used to treat his labourers, locking them in underground cellars lest they should divulge the secret of the mine, and how, on one occasion, when Peter's spies and officials came to investigate, Dimidoff flooded the cellar and had all the workmen washed away.

Tula is famous not only for the manufacture of guns and ammunition, but also for samovars. Hence the Russian saying, to carry samovars to Tula, which means the same thing as carrying coals to Newcastle. There is also another quaint Russian idiom in which the word samovar occurs, and Nalin and I said that during this trip we had taken our samovars with us—which meant that we were accompanied by our wives.

Tula was almost exactly half way to Orel, where we spent the night. A little beyond Tula a familiar road branched off to Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy's home, to which we took Muriel Lester last week.

A hundred kilometres beyond Yasnaya Polyana lay the town of Mtsensk, full of churches, some of which, said Valia, were 'acting churches', by which she meant that they were still being used. Just before we reached Mtsensk we saw a signpost to the museum of Turgenev. Thither we went over rolling hills. The museum is located in the house in which Turgenev lived as an exile from 1852 to 1854 and which he often visited on other occasions as well. The arrangement of the museum is calculated to impress visitors not only with the genius of Turgenev as an

artist but the decadence and cruelty of the feudal background from which he sprang and which he found revolting. We were shown the genealogical tree which showed that Turgenev was descended on his paternal side from one Turgen, a Tartar who lived in the fifteenth century and was converted to Christianity. The most enterprising member of the family was one Lutovinov, Turgenev's maternal grand-uncle, who owned 10,000 hectares of land and built a 40-roomed house, which was destroyed by fire in 1906, a church which could still be seen, and a mausoleum for himself. He also laid out a beautiful park in which he planted full-grown trees, transported from distant gardens by his sweating serfs. Turgenev's own father was comparatively poor—he owned only 120 serfs—but he married a rich woman ten years older than himself. This woman was the embodiment of cruelty. She used to treat her servants like chattels; the more devoted they were to her the more she ill-treated them. We were shown a register in which she used to enter meticulously the punishments which she awarded to her servants. Turgenev has related how he himself used to be beaten by her every day. His only joy in childhood was the company of an old serf who was literate and used to read out to him Russian folk tales and thus generated in him an interest in Russia's storied past.

We were shown a number of portraits done by famous painters. The most interesting was one of Turgenev with a gun, a dog and a serf. The talks which he had with all manner of people in the course of his hunting expeditions formed the material for his book *Diary of a Sportsman*. There he depicted the peasants in a sympathetic light and their landlords as cruel and avaricious men. It was this which caused the Tsar to exile him to the village in which the house is located, though the ostensible reason was that he had expressed some obnoxious sentiments in his obituary of Gogol.

Our guide then took us for a walk in the park and showed us the trees which Turgenev had planted; the favourite lanes in which he used to stroll with Savina, a great actress of that time; the stables where his mother used to get the servants beaten; the open space under the great trees where he used to play chess with his cronies or dance with his girl friends; and the grove in which he wrote his *Rudin* in seven weeks. 'Nowhere', wrote Turgenev, 'can one write better than in a Russian village, where the very air is full of thoughts.'

Turgenev died in France in 1883. His last wish was that his body should be taken to St Petersburg and buried by the side of his friend Belinsky. We saw on the walls of the museum an extract from a letter which he wrote to his friend a few days before his death. 'Bow low,' he said, 'to my house, to my park, to my young oak and to my motherland which I shall never see again.' We, too, bowed to the oak, now 140 years old.

THE BLACK EARTH AND THE WOODED STEPPE

AFTER leaving Turgenev's home we entered what geographers call the black earth of Russia. From Orel onwards the soil became blacker until it culminated in the rich, fertile fields of the Ukraine.

Even before we reached Orel, the countryside began to look different from what it did in the Moscow-Leningrad region. There were no more woods, even trees were scarce. This was reflected in the construction of the houses. The houses in Central Russia were made not of wood but of stone. We were now in the Central Russian uplands, broken up by numerous gullies and ravines, caused by erosion and the destruction of forests. There was some cultivation here and there, but the soil seemed unfertile and crops were poor. Potatoes and sugar beet were the principal crops. There was some wheat too. The winter wheat had been harvested, and the spring wheat was in the process of being harvested. Grain, curiously enough, was being dried on the sides of the roads. In some places the land was being got ready for the sowing of crops. In Tsarist times this region had suffered greatly from the wasteful farming methods of that period, but now all land had been collectivized and was being cultivated by means of mechanized ploughs, tractors and combines.

On the afternoon of the 2nd at the 700th kilometre from Moscow, we crossed the border of Russia into the Ukraine. Here the middle Russian uplands merged imperceptibly into the steppe—*imperceptibly, because the steppe had been converted to cultivation*. Between the Russo-Ukrainian border and Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine, not an inch of land was left uncultivated.

The Ukraine is an area of intensive agriculture and covers about a fifth of the total sown area of the USSR. It produces nearly a quarter of the grain and two-thirds of the sugar of the entire Soviet Union. There were vast fields of maize and sunflower, and wheat was beginning to sprout. There were orchards, too, and long lines of poplar which gave a Kashmir touch to the scenery. The villages in the Ukraine were much bigger than those in Russia and the people looked more prosperous.

We spent the second night in Kharkov, which was the capital of the Ukraine until 1934. The approach to Kharkov was beautiful—a lovely avenue of poplars on both sides of the road and thick forests beyond, in which were located children's homes, pioneer camps and sanatoria. The importance of Kharkov lies in the fact that it is a great industrial centre, producing tractors, turbine generators, coal-mining and oil-drilling equipment, electrical goods, diesel motors, ball bearings, machine tools, harvester combines, locomotives and bicycles.

The entire region through which we passed bore the ravages of war. Orel, where we spent the first night, had the distinction of being the city in the Soviet Union to which the first salute was fired in the great victory parade in Moscow in 1943, for it was the first city to have been liberated from the Germans. With it was bracketed another city, which we passed at noon on 2 September, namely Belgorod, 'the White city', so called because of the neighbouring chalk hills from which half of all the writing chalk of the USSR is produced. Between Orel and Belgorod lies the more famous city of Kursk, which saw some savage battles during the Second World War. The approach to Kursk was marked by a number of memorials to fallen soldiers, war graves and captured tanks with appropriate inscriptions. Valia described vividly how this whole region had been covered with corpses and how the thaw used to bring the bodies out of the snow in which they had lain during the winter months. And when we picked some tender maize from the fields and ate it, the eerie thought struck us that it might have sprung from the corpse of some unknown soldier.

Again and again in the course of history the black earth, over which we motored so easily and comfortably, had been turned red by hordes of invaders from the East as well as the West, from the Tartars of the twelfth century to the Germans of the twentieth. In the eighteenth century this operation was performed by the

Swedes, and we spent a couple of hours on the historic battlefield of Poltava, some 150 km on the road from Kharkov to Kiev. We saw the battlefield and visited the museum. The director explained to us, with the aid of maps, pictures and quotations from the diaries of Peter the Great as well as from Pushkin's poem 'Poltava', how Peter the Great decisively defeated Charles XII of Sweden and thus established his country as a great power in Europe. On the peaceful field by which we stood in silence, there had lain, on 21 June 1709, the bodies of 9,234 Swedes and 1,345 Russians. We saw the *Bratskaya Mogila*, 'The Brothers' Grave' in which the Russians had all been buried together. We also saw the monument which the Russians had chivalrously erected on the site of battle with the inscription, 'Eternal glory to the Swedish heroes who were killed in battle'. It called to my mind the chivalrous toast which was proposed at a banquet given on the night of the victory by Peter the Great, who had learned military strategy from the Swedes, in honour of the defeated Swedish Generals. 'I drink,' he said, 'to my teachers in the art of war'. 'It is well,' replied the Swedish General, 'that you have paid us for your first lesson'.

KIEV, PAST AND PRESENT

ALL roads, they say in Western Europe, lead to Rome. There is a similar Russian proverb about Kiev: 'To Kiev your tongue will find the way'. Our tongue took a long time to find its way to Kiev. During the first year of our stay in the USSR, Kiev was out of bounds for foreigners. Nevertheless I decided to take my chance and asked Vyshinsky, who was then Foreign Minister, whether I might visit Kiev on my way back from Budapest in March 1953. Vyshinsky smiled and said that he would see, but that it did not lie with him to grant such a request. A week later I was informed, to my own surprise as well as that of my colleagues, that permission had been granted for my visit. Unfortunately I could not avail myself of this permission as Stalin died while I was in Budapest and I had to rush back to Moscow. Nowadays it is no unusual experience for a foreigner to visit Kiev. When we were there it was full of visitors. A delegation

of Indian singers and dancers, numbering 35, was at the Ukraine hotel, and we ourselves stayed at the Intourist. In the dining-room one heard a babel of tongues, American ringing louder than the rest.

Our first visit was to the zoo to see Ravi and Shashi, two baby elephants, aged 18 and 15 months, sent last year by Nehru as presents from the children of India to the children of Russia. In a letter to me he described them as 'two Ambassadors from India to the Soviet Union, in addition to yourself'. 'Only,' he added, 'they will be specially accredited to the children of the Soviet Union.' Since I saw them last, Ravi and Shashi had grown bigger and naughtier. They would put the tips of their trunks into the pockets of the visitors in order to see whether there were any sweets for them there. Nehru's charming message to the children of Russia was displayed prominently in Russian and in Ukrainian near the abode of Ravi and Shashi.

Kiev has been the capital of the Ukraine since 1934. Next to Russia, the Ukraine has the largest population in the USSR—42 million, roughly equal to the population of France. The Ukrainians are the second most important national group in the USSR. With the annexations of territory from Poland in 1939, from Rumania in 1950 and from Czechoslovakia in 1945, the Ukraine now forms a single political entity. It is the most densely populated Republic in the Union and has the densest rail network. It is one of the granaries of the Soviet Union, and its industry is as highly developed as its agriculture.

Behind the progress of the present lies the glory of the past. It was at Kiev that the more gracious features of Russian civilization developed from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. That was a period, perhaps the only period, when Russia was in every sense a part of Europe. Nowadays people speak glibly of the European Defence Community, European Economic Co-operation, the defence of Europe against Communism and so forth—as if Russia was not in Europe at all! Indeed, Peter the Great himself, when he moved the capital of Russia to St Petersburg in order to establish 'a window on Europe' implicitly admitted that Russia had lain outside Europe. And so it had, for it was a province of Tartary from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century and it has still not completely outgrown some of the features which it assumed then. But in the Kievan period of Russian history, Russia was as fully a part of Europe as any other Western state.

On the morning of the 5th the Minister of Culture took us for a walk on the ridge overlooking the Dnieper. A glorious river, so broad that Gogol said that 'a bird cannot fly over it at one stretch', and dotted near Kiev with a number of lovely islands which are now being turned into hydro-parks. During our walk the present of Kiev jostled with its past. We passed the statue of Vatutin, the 43-year-old general who liberated the Ukraine from the Germans and died fighting, a dental college, a botanical institute, and the quaint church of St Andrew, architecturally at once Eastern and Western, pagan and Christian in the construction of which Rastrelli, the builder of the Winter Palace in Leningrad, let his fancy run riot. In the distance lay the industrial quarter of Podol, which produces machine tools, motors, aircraft parts, boilers, agricultural implements, cycles and motor-cycles, electrical goods and equipment for chemical and sugar industries. Watching these multifarious activities there stands the magnificent statue of King Vladimir, who adopted Christianity in 989. I am never tired of recalling the manner of his conversion. To start with, Vladimir was a fanatical heathen who, as the chronicler says, was 'insatiable in vice' and sacrificed thousands of lives to his gods. Yet he had an inquisitive mind and weighed the merits and demerits of different religions. The Jewish religion appealed to him for a time, but he was repelled by it when a Rabbi told him that the Jews had been scattered over the face of the earth because of their sins. Islam which prohibited drinking was obviously unsuitable for a people in a cold climate. Catholicism did not suit Vladimir, because the Pope regarded himself as above all secular rulers. The Greek Orthodox Church had no such defects. The beauty of its services and the sweetness of its music appealed to his aesthetic tastes. The emissaries he had sent to Constantinople brought glowing accounts of the beauty of the churches in Greece. 'Then we went on to Greece,' they reported, 'and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worshipped their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendour or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. We can never forget that beauty.'

Vladimir thus became an Orthodox Christian. Soon after his conversion he performed an unchristian act in the name of Christianity. He marched on Kherson on the shores of the Black Sea, conquered it and converted it to Christianity. 'Civilization,' says that wise historian of Russia, Bernard Pares, 'is usually offered to the uncivilized at a price; and the price is independence.'

Next day our party went in different directions. Anujee and Valia went icon-hunting; Sharada and I went on a cruise on the Dnieper; and Nalin and Kudu went to see an army competition between the Swedes and the Russians. Nalin was glad to see a few soldiers at last. He had been looking for them all the way from Moscow. He had hoped to see something of military interest as this was the season for manoeuvres. Perhaps the soldiers were kept away from the main roads which were being increasingly used by tourists. Or perhaps they were being employed on the great harvesting operations in Kazakhstan and Siberia, where bumper crops are expected. Whatever the explanation, Nalin saw no manoeuvres.

Sharada and I enjoyed our cruise on the Dnieper alongside the city of Kiev, which extends for 25 kilometres. The churches and monasteries, built in various styles on the hillock overlooking the river, presented a beautiful view, marred only by a solitary chimney emitting smoke, like an uncouth individual belching at an elegant dinner party. From our boat we saw a tall column which, we were told, marked the spot where the first conversion to Christianity took place. Thereafter there were mass conversions and mass baptisms in the Dnieper. I thought of Feng Yu-hsiang in China, 'the Christian General' who, having no river close by, turned a fire hose on his regiment and told the men: 'Soldiers! You have been baptised!'

Kiev is noted for its architectural monuments. To look for them, however, is a tantalizing business. The earliest of these monuments, the Uspenski Sobor, founded by Vladimir, was wrecked by the Tartars in 1240; and the Germans did to the reconstructed church what the Tartars did to the original. A visit to St Sophia's Cathedral, founded by Vladimir's son Yaroslav the Wise, was more satisfying. However the Cathedral which we saw, with its 21 domes built in the style of the Polish-Ukrainian baroque, and its 13 cupolas signifying Christ and his twelve apostles, was very different from the original, of which a model is

kept in the church. Many frescoes in the old church have been restored. Among them are the figures of Yaroslav and his daughters. Yaroslav the Wise, like Akbar the Great, extended his influence by a series of matrimonial alliances. He himself married a sister of the Polish King, and his daughters were married into the royal houses of France, Greece and Hungary. Thus in those days Russia did indeed belong to Europe. One cannot imagine Khrushchev's son marrying a princess!

The most sublime or, if you are of a secular bent of mind, the most gruesome sight of all was the Monastery of the Caves, founded by Abbot Theodosius in 1073. Here, in the caves dug out of the clay banks along the Dnieper, lived the first group of Russian monks who hoped to obtain salvation by the mortification of the flesh. With candles in our hands, we groped our way through the dark and narrow passages of a subterranean labyrinth, in every corner of which there lay the body of a monk. These bodies, numbering about a hundred, have lain there for 900 years. The faithful would doubtless regard this as a miracle, the sceptical would attribute it to some peculiar quality in the clay of the banks of the Dnieper. Among the category of the faithful must be reckoned Rani Chanda who listened eagerly to a priest's account of the life of these monks. Most of them sought death by starvation. What little food they took was served to them through an aperture in their living tombs at increasingly infrequent intervals, until finally they took none at all. The members of Chanda's delegation were denied the privilege of visiting these caves. Slipchenko, the Liaison Officer, told them that there was nothing to see except a dark passage and a number of coffins! Kiev, once the holy of holies in Eastern Christendom, has become an arsenal of communism.

MOLDAVIA

A TWO-HOUR flight from Kiev brought us and our singers and dancers to Iushinev, the capital of Moldavia. No Indian has set his foot here before nor, so far as we know, any foreigner. We had a great welcome, and it seemed the whole city had turned out to greet us. The road to our hotel was lined by crowds

with flowers in their hands; and even after we entered our hotel they waited in the courtyard, longing to get another glimpse of these rare visitors to their city. Anujee and I went out and waved from our balcony, rousing a tumultuous cheer. I felt like Shahjahan giving *darshan* to his people from a balcony in the Red Fort in Agra. Anujee said that she, too, felt a little like Mumtaz Mahal. I warned her that I would not be able to build a Taj Mahal for her; and therefore there would be no point in her passing away before me.

Yesterday we went for a drive to the Soviet-Rumanian border. Moldavia was very different from any other Republic we had so far visited. Here were no woods or forests as in North Russia nor any steppes as in the South. The landscape consisted of a jumble of gently undulating hills and valleys. Corn was the principal crop. The most characteristic cultivation, however, was the vine; this little Republic produces a third of all the wine in the Soviet Union. Orchards were plentiful, and the plums, peaches and apples were the most delicious we had ever tasted. Yet these fruits do not find their way to Moscow, which shows how inadequate is the transport system in the Soviet Union.

We also visited a collective farm, named after the great Russian scientist, Michurin. It was some 7,000 acres in extent and worked by 2,600 labourers. After the previous night's rain, the air was crisp and clear and we had hoped to walk among the vines and other fruit trees in the garden. However, the manager of the farm, who was a born orator, preferred to take us to his office and proposed a number of toasts in our honour and treated us to an amateur entertainment in which the workers, with their colourful costumes, sang, danced and recited poems, including one from Tagore. Evidently the manager wanted to show us that the promotion of culture in his collective farm went hand in hand with the development of agriculture.

Kishinev is situated on a plateau among the picturesque Kodri hills. Like almost all the towns we passed through during this tour, Kishinev was badly damaged and almost destroyed during the war. The proposed reconstruction here has not been as spectacular as in Kiev, Kharkov and Kursk, probably because Moldavia is essentially agrarian and the vast majority of the people live in the villages. The few Russians there live mostly in the cities. Before the war Jews accounted for 10 per cent of the

population. On our way to the Michurin collective farm we saw a Jewish cemetery, but not many occupants come to it nowadays because the number of Jews has been drastically reduced by Hitler's policy of extermination. We heard an interesting story about Jews in the Soviet Union. The Head of the Orthodox Church offered a high place in the church to a rich Jew if he would adopt Christianity. He was prepared to make him a Bishop, but the Jew refused. He then offered him an Archbishopric. Even that did not appeal to the Jew. 'What!', he asked the Jew in exasperation, 'Do you want to be God?' 'One of us', replied the Jew, 'succeeded in becoming even that!'

Not only the Jews but the Moldavians in general have suffered from the vicissitudes of history. They speak a Rumanian dialect and were incorporated in Rumania at the end of the First World War. Bessarabia, which forms the bulk of Moldavia, has changed hands many times during the last 200 years. It was annexed by Russia in 1811 after the brilliant campaign of Kutuzov against Turkey during the Napoleonic Wars, but a portion of it had to be ceded to Turkey at the Conference of Paris in 1856. It was reannexed by Russia by the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878 but was included in Rumania at the end of the First World War. The Soviet Union, however, set up an autonomous Moldavian Republic as an expression of their title to Bessarabia. At the beginning of the Second World War Rumania was obliged to cede Bessarabia to the Soviet Union and the Moldavian Republic was set up. Since then it has seen great social and economic changes, but Moldavia still differs from other Soviet Republics in the nature of its economy. Little attempt has been made to establish heavy industry. No factories mar the landscape, no chimneys foul the air. The Moldavians are a happy lot, tending the vine, making wine and canning fruit and vegetables. At a farewell banquet given by the Minister of Culture in honour of our delegation of singers and dancers, I was happy to propose a toast 'To Moldavia, the land of sunshine, the land of wine, women and song—good wine, comely women and lovely songs.'

ODESSA

OUR delegation had a hearty send-off from Kishinev. Anujee and I accompanied the party as far as Odessa—a forty-minute flight—and saw them off to Bucharest. Nalin, Sharada and Kumar had arrived in Odessa the previous night, travelling by car. They told me that the road from Kiev to Odessa, unlike the section from Moscow to Kiev, was execrable. It took them 12 hours to do the 580 kilometres.

At Odessa we were met by the Mayor, who drove us round and showed us the progress Odessa had made in his time—the new projects launched, the new sanatoria built, the new avenues planted and the roads newly tarred. He was so full of energy he was nicknamed 'Davai, Davai'. He would suddenly appear among the workmen and shout, 'Davai, Davai' (Come on, Come on); and seeing him at a distance, the workmen would nudge each other and say, 'There comes Davai, Davai.'

We spent three days in Odessa. Situated on the warm and unfreezing Black Sea, between the Dnieper and the Dniester rivers, and descending by a series of staircases into the Bay, Odessa was indeed a picturesque city. I let my thoughts wander over its history and traditions, despite the attempts of my hospitable guides to rivet my attention on the recent progress and reconstruction. Here long ago there was a Greek colony, and the vases and bronzes in the museum showed how high a degree of civilization that colony had reached. Then for some twenty centuries Odessa disappeared from history. It reappeared under the name of Hajibeg in the latter half of the eighteenth century when the Turks built a fortress there called Yeni Duniya or New World. Their new world however did not last long, because as a result of the Russo-Turkish war the Turks were compelled to cede this region to Russia. Here Catherine the Great founded a town and called it by its old Greek name.

In front of the hotel in which I was accommodated stands, in a Roman toga, the statue of the Duke of Richelieu to whom Odessa owes much of its early splendour. An exile from the French Revolution, he spent fourteen years at the beginning of the nineteenth century as the Governor of Odessa and was

greatly loved by the people With the restoration of the monarchy in France, the Duke returned to Paris to become Prime Minister

Not far from his statue stands the bust of Pushkin, with the simple inscription 'To Pushkin, citizen of Odessa' In reality he was an exile in Odessa for a year, having been banished from St Petersburg for some of his subversive poems Here he wrote several famous poems, including a portion of *Legendy Onegin* Here also he fell in love with Countess Vorontsova, the wife of his own chief, the Governor-General of Odessa The Count was too much of a gentleman to take notice of the attentions which a petty poetaster paid to his wife, but he conveniently intercepted one of his letters in which there were some sentiments favouring atheism, and had him banished to Kishinev with instructions to report on a threatened invasion of locusts in Moldavia Pushkin's report ran as follows

The locusts flew on and flew on, then alighted

To stay.

They sat and they sat and ate everything up, then

Flew far away

Next to Pushkin's statue stands a gun, a relic of the Crimean War It was captured from the *Tiger*, one of the English ships which bombarded Odessa and was sunk Our guide told us proudly that the gun showed the fate which would overtake any enemy who attempted to assault their city again

The entire coast of the Bay of Odessa was dotted with villas and mansions in which the aristocrats of the nineteenth century lived in pomp and luxury These villas have now been turned into sanatoria and rest homes There are 72 already, and 8 more have been provided for in the next Five Year Plan The elegant house of Count Dimitri Tolstoy, which contained a fine picture gallery and in which the Rumanian General Alexander lived during the Second World War, is now a scientists' club The mansion where the wealthy Olga Narishkin used to give gay parties is now a sailors' club The old and magnificent Merchants' Guild is now a Conservatory of Music The most magnificent of all the buildings, the Vorontsov Palace, built by the French architect Buffon in the Russian classical style, is now a Palace of Pioneers How Pushkin must have stood there among a horde of minor officials and watched,

Hopeless and tongue-tied,
With pangs, the jealous and the timid know,

as Countess Vorontsova, his Titania, came down the steps in regal dignity.

The two institutions of which Odessa is justly proud are the Opera House and the Filatov Institute. The Odessians claim that their opera house is the finest in Europe, comparable to the one in Vienna, and designed by Viennese architects. *Swan Lake* was on but neither the White nor the Black Swan came anywhere near Plisetskaya's inimitable standards. However, Tchaikovsky's music was there; and I was interested to learn that Tchaikovsky himself conducted the orchestra in this theatre at the first presentation of *Swan Lake*.

I spent a morning in the Filatov Institute, known after Dr Filatov, who has perfected the art of curing certain eye diseases by grafting eyes taken from corpses. I asked the directress whether they experienced much difficulty in getting a sufficient number of eyes. She said there was no difficulty at all, as people had no feeling against the extraction of eyes from dead bodies for a public purpose. I was told about a woman who had lost her child and later came to know that its eyes had been taken out and grafted on someone else. She went to the Institute and inquired how the patient was progressing. On hearing that he was well, she said that she felt that a part of her child was still alive.

In Odessa I met a Tartar waiter, Zikriya Ibrahimovich. Seventy years of age, he had been a waiter for 55 years. He recalled how his mother used to read the Koran to him and impress on him that alcohol was *haram*—an injunction which he has not disobeyed. Though he spent his most impressionable years in the time of the Tsars, he was fair to the present regime. In Tsarist times, he said, a Tartar could be a waiter and no more; now there were Tartar doctors, Tartar engineers and Tartar administrators.

THE FOUNTAIN OF BAKHCHISARAI

DURING this trip one of my minor ambitions was fulfilled. We visited Bakhchisarai. Ever since we saw the *Fountain of Bakhchisarai* in the Bolshoi theatre I had been wanting to see the original fountain which, I had heard, still existed in the heart of the Crimea. I mentioned this to the Mayor of Odessa and he communicated my wish to the authorities at Simferopol, the headquarters of the Crimean oblast.

We flew to Simferopol from Odessa. We were received at the airfield by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the City Soviet. They waved aside the Intourist representative, who had also come with a car to take us to Yalta, and took us in their own luxurious car to the city, gave us a superb breakfast cum lunch and then drove us to Bakhchisarai and on to Yalta. We hardly saw anything of the scenery between Simferopol and Bakhchisarai. The heavy meal and the potent liqueurs, combined with the fatigue of a bumpy air journey, sent us to sleep.

At Bakhchisarai we went straight to the museum. The directress explained to us how one civilization after another had ebbed and flowed in this region. Man had occupied this peninsula as early as 25,000 years ago. We saw objects showing how he had passed through the palaeolithic and neolithic ages. There followed a series of settlers, Sarmatians, Scythians and Greeks, who developed high standards of civilization. We saw how grapes used to be pressed by the feet of men to yield their juice and how it was converted into wine and stored in stone containers, of which we saw some specimens. At that time there was a good water supply, and we saw the clay pipes through which the city was supplied with water. Christianity came to the Crimea long before it did to Russia, and we saw relics of churches and monasteries of the sixth and seventh centuries. The sculptures and frescoes reminded me of those in the earlier caves at Ellora and Ajanta.

All this civilization was wiped away by the invasion of the Tartars in the thirteenth century. Riding without saddle, living on mare's milk and dried meat and, when necessary, drawing blood from the veins of their horses, these men spread

death and desolation from the Crimea in the south to Novgorod in the north throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By the end of the fifteenth century their power had declined; and one Azi Girei founded a separate Tartar dynasty owing nominal allegiance to Turkey. This dynasty ruled over the Crimea for three centuries, until it was absorbed by Russia at the end of the eighteenth century in the reign of Catherine the Great.

From the museum we proceeded to the palace of the Khans of the Crimea. It consisted of a number of courtyards, with pleasant gardens and villas, some of which had Arabic inscriptions and mosaic work executed by Italian craftsmen. We saw a room where cases used to be tried; another, where Ambassadors used to be received. There were mosques and towers and decorated cages for birds. Cages also, our guide said, for the women of the Khan's harem, who were treated no better than birds. We saw four separate houses enclosed by high walls for the Khan's four lawful wives. We saw the jewellery they used to wear, the carpets and cushions on which they used to recline, the silver dishes from which they ate, the pencils with which they painted their eyebrows, the water jug containing holy water from Mecca and another jug, containing rose-water, with which the Khan gargled after his meals. One room was designated the Khan's resting room in the summer; another was called his resting room in the winter but, said the directress of the museum, there was no room which was earmarked as his office. The Khan, she said, had only three occupations in life: to eat halva, to caress women and to listen to the flattery of the servants and sycophants who surrounded him.

Yet the Khans must have had more in them, or their dynasty would not have survived for three hundred years. Even Russia sometimes reeled under the blows of the Khanate of the Crimea and, at other times, sought the help of the Khans in her campaigns against her enemies. We saw a picture in which, after the Russian army had been defeated in 1660 by the Tartars and the Poles not far from Moscow, General Sheremetev was carried off as a prisoner to the Crimea, where he remained for 21 years. Another harrowing picture, executed by the great Russian painter Levin, showed the chief of the Ukraine, Bogdan Himelnitsky, leaving his son with the Tartars as hostage for the huge sum which he offered to pay in return for their help against the Poles.

Pushkin, who visited Bakhchisarai from his exile in Odessa, had a true appreciation of the strength as well as the weakness of the Tartar Khans. He has brought out their character in his poem, 'The Fountain of Bakhchisarai,' which has become a favourite ballet at the Bolshoi. The story is simple. Khan Girei attacks a Polish castle and, in a splendid hand-to-hand fight, kills the son of the Polish chief and takes Maria, his fiancée, prisoner. On seeing her, he meets a force stronger than any he has yet encountered. For the first time he is in love. He takes Maria to his palace in Bakhchisarai. Maria resists his entreaties and is killed in a fit of jealousy and anger by Zarema, the star of the Khan's harem. The Khan sentences Zarema to a horrible end and builds a fountain at Bakhchisarai as a memorial of his unquenchable grief over the death of Maria.

Sitting on the steps in front of the Fountain, as Pushkin had done, we listened to the story of its construction. The girl in whose memory the Fountain of Bakhchisarai was constructed, and whose death left the Khan inconsolable, was one Dil Rabikesh. Baron de Tott, a French soldier who helped the Khan to reorganize his army, has left an interesting conversation on record. He asked the Khan how old Dil Rabikesh was when she died. 'She had seen but fourteen springs,' the Khan replied. The Baron asked how was it that the Khan was so much in love with such a young girl. 'Because,' replied the Khan, 'she was wise as a serpent, brave as a lioness, strong as an eagle, tender as a child, fond as a mother, kind as a sister and passionate as a lover.'

The Fountain was constructed in 1764 by an Iranian architect, Omar, in response to the Khan's injunction that he should build a memorial the stones of which would weep his sorrow through the ages. The stones do indeed weep for drop by drop water drips gently from the many crevices in this marble fountain. If the Taj Mahal is a symbol of love the Fountain of Bakhchisarai is a symbol of grief, inextinguishable and almost invisible. Thus, said Pushkin when he visited this fountain, does a mother weep who has lost her son in battle.

YALTA

OUR drive from Bakhchisarai to Yalta was unique—for the Soviet Union. After the flat plains of Russia and the vast steppes of the Ukraine, it was a relief to see the mountains. Soon after we left Bakhchisarai, the hills started getting bigger and bigger and seemed to come closer and closer to us until they almost hemmed us in; and our car wound its way through them in a series of hairpin bends. Our driver exclaimed: 'This is not a road, it is a staircase!' Indeed, the hairpin bends were even more numerous than on the road from Ramboda to Nuwara Eliya, that lovely hill station in Ceylon. In fact the Crimea, with the sea on all sides, its hills and dales and its luxuriant vegetation, bore a striking resemblance to Ceylon. After two hours' dangerous driving, made the more dangerous by rain, we reached the top of a plateau where there was a group of strangely shaped rocks called Aipetri (St Peter). Here there were no trees, and not even a blade of grass. It was a blasted heath, fit not so much for St Peter as for the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth*. A howling wind was blowing; and nearly blew us off our feet when we got out of the car to shake hands with the President of the City Soviet who had come to greet us.

It was from this desolate spot that we obtained our first view of Yalta, far, far below on the sea coast. There, there was no wind or rain and the Black Sea looked like a sunlit lake. Oblivious of the commotion of the elements above it Yalta slept peacefully, like a child by the agitated bosom of its mother in an air-raid shelter.

Here we were accommodated in the Hotel Ukraine. It was badly damaged during the war and has recently been reconstructed. It is the most comfortable hotel in which we have stayed in the Soviet Union. I have stayed in more luxurious hotels but the Soviet conception of luxury is somewhat Victorian. The more *de luxe* a room, the more it is littered with antique furniture, cut glass chandeliers and marble statuettes. In the Hotel Ukraine an attempt has been made to cater to the tastes of modern tourists. The waiters too are smarter, and the waitresses are a picked bunch of good-looking girls, some with Tartar features which appeal

specially to our oriental eyes. Our favourite, however, is a rickety old waiter, a survivor from Tsarist days. He did Anujee a service which she can never forget. Ever since she came to the Soviet Union she had been asking all and sundry for an old icon. This waiter brought one for her and sold it to her at a fraction of the price she was willing to pay. I was sorry to hear that Sharada, normally so soft hearted that the sight of a dog or a peal of thunder sends her into shivers scolded him right and left for bringing her breakfast late. Not even his plea that his legs were not as young as they used to be had any effect on her. I have rarely scolded servants and never one older than myself. I would rather put up with their infirmities than pull them up. Old age has a pathetic sanctity which exacting youth has no right to molest.

In Yalta we met the oldest person we have come across, Maria Pavlovna, Chekhov's sister, aged 93. Our first visit in Yalta was to Chekhov's house. We saw the study in which he wrote *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*, the dining room with the same embroidered table cloth that Chekhov had used the piano on which Chaliapin had played, the gun with which Chekhov used to go shooting and so his sister said, brought back nothing, and the two small ebony elephants Chekhov had brought from Ceylon on his way back from Sakhalin. More interesting than all these inanimate objects was his nonagenarian sister.

It is a rare privilege for a visitor to be taken to see Maria Pavlovna. We expected to see a wizened, bespectacled old woman. What was our surprise when we saw a young old lady, looking no older than my mother did when she died—she was 78—and somewhat resembling her, and reading and writing without the aid of spectacles! Her sister-in-law, she said slightly patronizingly, suffered from eye trouble though she was only 86. She was referring to Olga Knipper, the young and gifted actress whom Chekhov married in 1901 and whose married life lasted only three years, for Chekhov died at the early age of 44 in 1904. Maria Pavlovna was wrapped up in her brother. She was the only sister among her five brothers and was somewhat spoiled by them. She was specially attached to Chekhov who used to order her about 'as if he was my Commander'. With a charming gesture, she showed how she used to sit 'like this, taut and nervous', on the first nights of her brother's plays. In 1893 he bought a

piece of land in Yalta and she and he together built the house in which she lived for 6 years with him and has gone on living for 52 years with his memory. She pointed with tears in her eyes to the tall cypress tree which she had planted in the year of his death. And I noticed that her eyes went involuntarily to the icon of the Dark Virgin and Child which stood before her.

In the mind of my generation, Yalta will always be associated with the Conference which was held here towards the end of the war, between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. It was here that Russia agreed—at a price—to join the war against Japan. It was also here that the United Nations was conceived. I, who assisted at its birth in San Francisco a few months later, am often surprised at the shape it is assuming, so different from what we had hoped.

We saw the glittering room in Livadia Palace in which the Yalta Conference was held. This palace used to be the residence of the Tsar but was converted into a sanatorium soon after the Revolution. Some 10,000 workmen enjoy rest and recuperation here every year, each for four weeks. We were taken to the Tsar's bedroom, overlooking the sea, and saw a dozen women hurriedly getting out of their beds, where they had been having their afternoon rest, and tidying their hair. We also saw the Tsarina's bedroom. It is smaller, but overlooks the mountains as well as the sea.

It was in Livadia Palace that Roosevelt was accommodated during the Yalta Conference. Churchill was put in the Vorontsov Palace. This was appropriate, because the palace was designed by an English architect in a strange mixture of styles, Gothic, Tudor and Moroccan. Over the Moroccan archway is written in Arabic a verse which sounds strange today: 'There is no happiness without God.'

THE ROAD TO MOSCOW

ON the evening of 15 September, Ratnam rang me up from Moscow and told me of the grave developments over the Suez Canal. It is strange that dramatic events should always happen when I am out of Moscow—Stalin's death, Beria's fall, Malenkov's resignation and now the Anglo-French attempt to coerce Egypt.

We left Yalta on our return journey to Moscow on the 16th. Instead of the rugged road through Bakhchusarai, we took the easier coastal road to Alushta and thence to Simferopol. This was the road over which we travelled with Nehru last year. No bridegroom going in procession to the bride's house has received a more flowery welcome than Nehru did in the Crimea last year. The Chairman of the City Soviet of Simferopol told me that, while following Nehru, his car skidded in the masses of roses which had been flung into the streets.

We motored to Alushta with vine covered hills to our left, and the sea, looking like frosted glass, to our right. We passed Artek with its picturesque rocks jutting from the sea, where a thousand Pioneers jubilantly greeted our Prime Minister last year. At Alushta we left the Black Sea and turned into the interior towards Simferopol. Thence we drove northwards to the tip of the Crimean Peninsula. We passed a town called Dzankoy, a Tartar town which, like Bakhchusarai and Balaclava, has been allowed to retain its original name. Most other Tartar towns have been re-named, allegedly because of the complicity of the Tartars with the Germans when they invaded the Crimea. We reached the narrow isthmus connecting the Crimea with the mainland and had lunch in that picturesque spot, with an outlet of the Black Sea to our left and the Sea of Azov to our right.

We now entered the southern steppe. In its vast and limitless grandeur it resembled a desert, except that it was covered with grass instead of with sand. It made good pasture land, and we saw more flocks of cattle here than anywhere else in the Soviet Union. Here and there was cultivation. The standing crops were mostly maize and sunflower. Apart from the soil the chief obstacle to cultivation in these regions is the violent winds that blow throughout the year. Wherever there was cultivation we saw windbreakers in the form of trees, often four rows of them running parallel to one another. For 300 kilometres after crossing the isthmus the road ran like an arrow over a vast expanse of steppe, as level as a pancake. The nature of the land in this region may be gauged from the fact that while we took three hours to cover the 100 kilometres of road from Yalta to Simferopol, we took no longer to cover the 370 kilometres from Simferopol to Zaporozhe.

We spent the night in Zaporozhe in a comfortable dacha which had been placed at our disposal by the Mayor. On the morning of the 17th we saw the Dnieper Dam or, as it is called in Russian, Dnieproges. 'Ges' is a contraction for Gydro-Electric Station. In Russian H becomes G. Thus, Hamlet becomes Gamlet; Humber becomes Gumber; and hydro-electric becomes gyro-electric. In Ukrainian, on the contrary, G is often pronounced as H. I thought of the porter in Acton who always said 'Hacton' and the porter in Hampstead who always said 'Ampstead', and the suggestion of *Punch* that the Hampstead porter should be transferred to Acton and vice versa.

From the hydro-electric station we saw an island, 12 miles long. It was here that the Zaporozhe Cossacks, famous in Russian history for their daring deeds, lived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The site on which the plant is built was called in the old days the Nest of Love, because women had to say good-bye to their men-folk there; they were not allowed to step into that he-man island. Not far from Zaporozhe is an oak, 600 years old, under which the Cossacks met and got a professional letter-writer to draft a reply full of the vilest invectives to the Sultan of Turkey, who had sent them an ultimatum—an incident brilliantly depicted in a famous painting of Repin, of which copies can be seen everywhere in the Soviet Union.

Before the Revolution, Zaporozhe was a little town of 30,000 people who brewed beer and grew maize. It used to be called Alexandrovsk after the Emperor Alexander the Second. After the Revolution, many towns named after Emperors and Empresses have been re-named. Ekaterinaslav, named after Catherine the Great, has become Dniepropetrovsk, and Ekaterinadar has become Krasnodar. Zaporozhe is now a city of 430,000 people and is growing fast. It used to be the scene of bitter fighting during the war and was practically razed to the ground. A new city with wide roads, spacious parks and stately public buildings is now rising from the ashes of the old.

We left Zaporozhe at 2.30 and covered the 280 kilometres to Kharkov in about 4 hours. We were still in the region of the steppe, but its nature had changed. It was no longer absolutely flat and treeless; there were undulating hills and picturesque little clumps of trees. Moreover, there was far more cultivation than in the southern steppe. Winter wheat, a few weeks old, formed

a green carpet for the earth where, in past centuries, there was nothing but grass, on which Tartar horses grazed and the Golden Horde galloped northwards to wrestle with the kingdoms of Kiev, Novgorod and Moscow—and to overthrow them for three centuries

We set out from Kharkov on the afternoon of the 18th, after spending the morning in a tractor factory. It had been raining and the roads were skiddy so we took six hours to cover the 380 kilometres from Kharkov to Orel. By the time we reached Orel the weather had cleared. We saw the sun setting with bloodshot eyes, as if in a tempestuous fury, and a pale full moon watching this spectacle like a woman who had suffered long from her husband's domination and was not unwilling to let him go.

We spent the night in Orel and left for Moscow on the 19th at 10. It was a perfect autumn day, cold and bracing and sunny. In the woods near Yasnaya Polyana, tipped and in places suffused with gold, we had lunch. There we came across an example of masculine aggression. A number of fowls came out from a neighbouring hut to greet us, clucking and shaking their heads, and I threw a tomato to them. Three hens started sharing this tomato and were happily enjoying it when a cock came defiantly, seized the tomato from off their beaks and strutted away, and the hens looked on, dazed and helpless. I thought to myself that in the world of fowls, too, the prevailing law is

The good old rule . . . the simple plan,
That they should take, who have the power,
And they should keep who can

And the latest events in the Suez Canal zone seemed to confirm that the good old rule was still in operation.

MOTHER VOLGA

NIZHNI NOVGOROD

I CANNOT bear to call this town Gorki. Or, rather, I do not have the heart to call it by any other than its ancient and romantic name, Nizhni Novgorod. Not that I do not admire Maxim Gorki: he is certainly one of the most vital figures of the Revolutionary period; but my historical sense revolts against the tendency to re-christen towns which have centuries of tradition behind them. Evidently Gorki himself felt embarrassed by the change of name. In a letter dated 19 February 1933, written from Sorrento where he had been lying ill with tuberculosis, Gorki confessed to his friend, Hitrovsky: 'Today, for the first time, I have to write "Gorki" instead of "Nizhni Novgorod" on the envelope. To me this is embarrassing and unpleasant.' I hope we in India shall never call Banaras 'Bankim Chander', or Jaipur 'Jawaharlal'!

We left Moscow on a midsummer day in 1957 at 7.30 and hoped to get into Nizhni Novgorod by noon, but in many places the road was being broadened to double its width. The surface was being dug up, the trees by the roadside were being uprooted and the lamp-posts and electricity poles pushed back. And rain had turned the road to mud and slush. It was a bumpy journey, and I felt sorry for Ameena who, though she will not admit it, is thought to be *enceinte*. However, we soon forgot these discomforts as the woods on both sides were lush green, spangled with wild strawberries and Ivan and Mary, a quaint plant which bears twin flowers, one violet and the other yellow.

We did not reach Nizhni Novgorod till about 6. It was just as well that we were delayed, for we arrived in time to see a glorious sunset over the confluence of the Volga and the Oka rivers. It was this strategic situation which caused the Grand Prince Vladimir to establish the town in 1221 and to give it the name Nizhni (lower) Novgorod, as distinct from Veliki (great) Novgorod. It kept its name for 711 years.

Nizhni Novgorod spreads itself out on the right banks of the Volga and the Oka. It is divided into two parts, the Upper Town and the Lower Town. Our hotel was situated in the Upper Town, within a stone's throw of the Kremlin. Erected in the fourteenth century as a bastion against the invading Bulgars and Mordvins, the Kremlin rises on a promontory on the bank of the Volga to a height of about 400 feet. With its walls, a hundred feet high, and its eleven towers, the Kremlin is indeed an impressive structure. From here we watched the Oka pouring its waters into the Volga. United they flow for 2,200 kilometres into the Caspian Sea.

Like most towns in the Volga region, Nizhni Novgorod has suffered many invasions. The earliest invaders were the Tartars who destroyed it in 1377, and the latest were the Germans who subjected it systematically to an hour's midnight bombing for 60 days in the middle of the war. They had good reason to try to cripple Nizhni, for it used to produce 10 per cent of the total industrial output of the USSR.

Even before the Revolution Nizhni was economically important. The Oka provided a direct route to the central sections of Russia, while the Volga exchanged the timber of the north with the oil and fish of the Caspian Sea. Not far from Nizhni the Kama river flows into the Volga. The Kama rises in the Ural mountains, bounding Central Asia, so Nizhni is a natural junction between Moscow and the East. At the great annual fair, for which Nizhni was famous in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, silk from China, shawls from Kashmir, carpets from Bokhara and dried fruits and nuts from Persia used to be sold, as well as furs, leather boots and woollen cloth from the north. I was told that in the year 1910 goods worth 250 million roubles were sold at the fair, and 400 000 visitors came from all parts of Asia and Europe. There were mosques, caravanserais, Tartar stores, Chinese sections and oriental shoemakers' streets at the Fair. Now all that is past. The fair has been abolished, and crushed by the steam-roller of modern industrial civilization, Nizhni has lost a good deal of its colour, charm and individuality.

In Nizhni we visited two museums in memory of Gorki. One was a small wooden dwelling hence, 115 years old, in which Gorki spent his childhood with his grandfather, his father having died when he was only 4. On entering the house, we saw a large

wooden cross and were told the story of it by our guide. Gorki's maternal grandfather, Kashirin, was a monster of cruelty, who used to flog his children and grandchildren mercilessly. Gorki has recorded how on one occasion he was flogged so hard that he fainted. There was no love between Kashirin and his sons; and Gorki recalls that the house reeked of mutual hatreds which poisoned its atmosphere and corrupted the minds of its inmates. Disliking and disliked by his sons, Kashirin adopted a boy mainly so that he might have an extra hand to help him in his dyeing business. Kashirin's sons were afraid that their father might give away some of his property to the adopted boy and decided to do away with him. On the first anniversary of a relation's death, the three young men were carrying a cross for his grave to the cemetery, as was the custom. The two sons of Kashirin deliberately dropped the cross on their adopted brother, crushing him to death. Such, our guide explained, was the cruel society of nineteenth-century Russia.

Nizhni Novgorod used to be noted for its churches. There stands in the Kremlin the Church of the Annunciation which was founded in 1370 and rebuilt in 1647, after the invasion of the Tartars. We were specially anxious to see it as it was reported to contain a picture of the Virgin by Monk Simeon, executed in 993, only five years after the introduction of Christianity into Russia. But our guide told us that the church was closed to visitors as it was undergoing repairs. He said the same thing about the Church of the Ascension, which contained the ikon of the wonder-working Pitchërskaya Virgin, dating from the fourteenth century. Perhaps the Virgins are no longer there; perhaps our guide did not want to distract our attention from the other objects which he showed us with zest, such as the Polytechnical Institute, where 5,000 students were studying; the Institute for Transport Engineers, having 2,500 students; the Pedagogical Institute, where Lenin's father had taught Mathematics for five years; the Political Prison, in which Gorki had been incarcerated; the house of the millionaire, Bukrov, which he had built as a home for the poor and in which Gorki found the originals of the characters of his play, *In the Depths*; and an ornate building, which the last of the Tsars of Russia erected in 1913 on the occasion of the third centenary of the establishment of the Romanoff Dynasty. This building was dedicated to the memory of the

butcher Minin and Prince Pozharski, who had together led a patriotic rising against the invading Poles and thus paved the way for the advent of Michael, the first of the Romanoffs. When the Tsar built the memorial in 1913, he little suspected the fate that awaited him and his dynasty four years later.

I was sorry not to have been able to visit the churches, but we had one compensation. On the way to Nizhni we stopped for an hour in Vladimir and saw the gracious Uspensky Cathedral and the famous Rublev frescoes, fading yet still alive. The frescoes of Vladimir were more mellow, more impregnated with the spirit of humanity, than the austere other worldly images of Veliki Novgorod, which we had seen almost exactly two years before. We saw only a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir. The original is in the Tretiakov Art Gallery in Moscow, but Our Lady seemed far more at home here, in the dim religious light of the Uspensky Cathedral, adored by devout worshippers and not merely gazed at by idle sightseers. Our Lady will abide with me for ever, for she has a look of infinite compassion and tenderness, not only for the divine Child who is clinging to her like a tendril, but for all humanity—a look for the like of which one must go to the Ajanta Caves and see the figure of the Bodhi sattva who, in his concern for all mankind, refused to accept salvation as long as a single living creature remained outside the pale.

A TARTAR REPUBLIC

We left Gorki by boat at 2 p.m. for Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea, 2,200 kilometres away. Vishnu and Ameena came on board and found to their surprise that I had a cabin as good as any on a P & O ship. It was beautifully panelled and, apart from a separate bathroom, had such luxuries as a telephone and a radio. There were two beds and I had to pay for both as there was no single berth *de luxe* cabin.

Leaving Gorki, we had a last view of the Kremlin, rising precipitously above us. To the north-west of the Kremlin lay Alexander's garden with extensive pleasure grounds and an artificial terrace, laid out on the steep slope overlooking the river. A little further away, outlined against the blue sky, stood the towering

statue of Chkalov, the first man to fly from Moscow to New York across the North Pole. Amidst the green foliage beyond it gleamed the white walls of the Petcherski Convent, built in 1329.

My cabin was on the starboard side of the ship. I was glad of this, because the right bank of the Volga was far more interesting than the left. To the left was a vast level plain, monotonous and liable to inundation. The right bank was high and hilly, covered with pine and fir, lime and oak. The Volga seemed like a man who had to steer his course between two women: one, meek and mild, flat-chested and flat-tempered, allowing herself to be overrun by her lord and master at his sweet will and pleasure; and the other, haughty and high-spirited, now smilingly approaching him, now sullenly receding from him, sometimes dominating him and always protecting him. But a Russian would not appreciate this simile. To him the Volga is never masculine. She is always a woman, Matushka Volga, Little Mother Volga.

In the morning we woke up to find our boat pulling up at Cheboksari. It is the capital of the Chuvash Autonomous Republic. We passed through or near three other Autonomous Republics, the Marri, the Mordvinian and the Tartar. These Autonomous Republics are the relics of the days when different tribes roamed about on the banks of the Volga, contending with one another and giving pin-pricks—and sometimes more than pin-pricks—to the Kingdoms of Vladimir and Muscovy.

Of them none was more formidable than the Tartars. How annoying they had been is shown by a Russian proverb, still current, that 'An uninvited guest is worse than a Tartar'. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Tartars carried out raids into the Kingdom of Muscovy, 'cutting the Christians down like grass'; and in 1382, they even captured the city of Moscow. In the fifteenth century, after the power of the Golden Horde had declined, a Tartar dynasty independent of the Horde established a Khanate in the Central Volga region with Kazan as its capital. Before long, Moscow began its advance against the Tartars. In 1469, Ivan III captured Kazan and appointed one Mohammed Amin as his Viceregent. Mohammed Amin showed his gratitude by invading the principality of Moscow and massacring the Russians in Moscow city in 1504. Nearly 50 years elapsed before the Khanate of Kazan was overthrown by Ivan the Terrible.

While approaching Kazan, we saw an island near the confluence of the Sviyaga river with the Volga. Here Ivan had assembled his army and consolidated his position before launching his final attack on Kazan in 1552. After the capture of Kazan the Russian army swept down the river bank and captured Astrakhan. Thus at last the Volga became a Russian river from its source in Lake Selgirs to its fall in the Caspian Sea. This important trade route from the north to the south was held by a series of frontier posts, all of which we saw during this trip—Nizhni Novgorod, Kazan, Samara now called Kuibyshev, Saratov, Tsaritsyn now called Stalingrad, and Astrakhan.

We arrived at Kazan at 2 p.m. and were unexpectedly met by a delegation including the President and the Vice-President of the Supreme Soviet of the Kazan ASSR, the Secretary of the Communist Party and others. The President was a Tartar woman. In meeting her, I did not feel that I had caught, or was caught by, a Tartar, she looked so soft and gentle. That Tartar women, who had been so backward before the Revolution, could now hold such important posts showed the extent of the progress which the Tartars had made. Our hosts took us to a flower-decorated room in the river port and treated us to an excellent lunch, with many toasts and much cognac. This was my second visit to Kazan. The first was two years ago when Prime Minister Nehru halted here for an hour. I inquired about a Tartar girl who had then regaled us with Tartar songs. My hosts teased me by saying that evidently I remembered her not because of her good songs but because of her good looks! Which indeed was true, for it is her sweet face rather than her sweet voice which has remained in my memory.

Soon after lunch my hosts drove me through a street, formerly called Prolomnaya ('Break through Street'), through which Ivan the Terrible broke into Kazan in 1552 and captured it. This vivid name alas, has now been changed to Bauman Street. We then drove up to the Kremlin which was erected by Khan Ulu Mohamet in the middle of the fifteenth century. Inside the palisades we saw a relic of Tartar architecture the Suyumbeke Tower, rising by seven stages to a height of 250 feet. A Tartar girl who accompanied us related how a Tartar Princess had hurled herself from the top of the tower in 1552 in despair at the ruin of her native city. Valia, our Russian interpreter, hastily added

that this was only a legend. We also saw in the distance a truncated pyramid, erected in 1823 as a memorial to the capture of Kazan. With even greater interest, we saw the Kazan University which was founded in 1804 and included among its alumni such distinguished names as Lenin, Leo Tolstoy, Aksakov, and Lobachevsky, 'the Russian Copernicus'. In front of the University stands a youthful statue of Lenin in an undergraduate pose.

Our hosts explained to me the progress which Kazan had made since the Revolution. Among its manufactures are locomotives, railway cars, aircraft and agricultural implements. It has now assumed a new importance, for petroleum has been found here and Kazan promises to be 'a second Baku'.

Until now my acquaintance with Kazan was confined to Gorki's vivid description of it as it was at the end of the last century, in his book *My Universities*. How different was it then! The Kazanka, on which Kazan stands, was then a little rivulet; now it is a 'sea' thanks to the Kuibyshev Dam which has raised the water level by 25 feet. It was on the banks of this little river that Gorki once sat, flinging pebbles into the dark waters all night long and, in his despair at the state of affairs in Russia, saying to himself again and again: 'What *shall* I do?' It was not far from here that he put a bullet into his chest, hoping to reach the heart but succeeding only in reaching the lungs. Well might Gorki have despaired of the future of Russia, for among the tramps, thieves and stevedores of the Volga wharves, where he himself pulled barges up and down the river, he found himself in 'a whirling world where men's instincts were coarse and their greed was naked and unashamed'. The students too led a wild, Bohemian life. For one rouble they could have a woman for a whole night in the brothels of Kazan. Even in Church boys and girls were in the habit of holding hands, so much so that a parson once rebuked them, saying: 'Beasts! Can you find no other place for your obscenity?' And yet there was no lack of intellectual interests among them. Gorki found many types of undergraduates—a normal school student who wrote five volumes of short stories, sought equilibrium of body and mind by joining the joiner's trade and, not finding it, committed suicide; another who felt that life without synthesis was impossible and tried to reconcile Marx with Nietzsche; a Tolstoyan who had a burning faith in the salvation

of the world by the power of love and who, in pure compassion, was prepared to rend his fellow men to pieces, believers in God who clinched their arguments by asking, 'Do you want to believe in Christ or in Darwin?', disbelievers who denied that man was made in God's image or that there was a God at all, for 'either God does not know how hard life is treating us, or he knows and is helpless, or he can help and does not care', budding revolutionaries plotting against the Tsar, and counter-revolutionaries, reciting with approval the words of Ibsen

The only Revolution that I recall
That was not altogether a cheat and a fraud,
One that out gloried all its successors,
That, of course, was the Great Deluge
But Lucifer was cheated even then,
For Noah, on the ark, became a dictator!

In these days of regimentation, the intellectual ferment of Gorki's time strikes us as at once preposterous and pathetic. Not dilettante speculations, such as those in which the students and intellectuals indulged, would lead to Russia's salvation, said Gorki, but only concentrated thought and hard work. Gorki looked forward to the day when all Russians would be seized by that 'intoxicating zest for work, than which only a woman's embrace can be more sweet'.

THE BOW OF SAMARA

FROM the Captain downwards, everyone was determined to see that we enjoyed this trip. The Captain was nicknamed 'the Millionaire'. A photograph of his recently appeared in the Soviet papers under this designation, for he had completed a million hours on the Volga. His house was in Nizhni Novgorod, famous for its sailors from time immemorial. Gorki has mentioned in his book that when he told some people in Kazan that he bailed from Nizhni, one of them said 'So you are one of the water bibbers, are you?', and another said 'Say, can you say where the gulls fly today?'

When I told Mrs Bischoff that I was going to sail down the Volga, she advised me to take a kettle and a packet of tea with me. She had done this trip five years ago and found that the ship's restaurant did not open till noon. Those were Stalin's days when even Government offices began working at noon and went on working till the small hours of the morning. Now the office hours have been changed—they are from 9 to 6—and the ship's restaurant opens at 8. The meals are excellent and overwhelming. Usually I order porridge and an omelette for breakfast. The porridge which was produced would have lasted me for a whole week in Moscow and the omelette was the largest I had ever eaten. No wonder the Russians are so fat! An Englishman told me that he asked a Russian why Russian women allowed themselves to put on so much weight. 'Because,' the Russian replied, 'we want our women to be women and not hollyhocks.'

We left Kazan at about 3 p.m. In the evening, we reached a spot where the Kama joined the Volga river. There is a town called 'The Mouth of the Kama', Kamskoe Usto, but we could not see the mouth at all. The fact is that the 'sea' of Kuibyshev, formed by the construction of a dam, extends right up to and beyond this spot and is 40 kilometres wide at the confluence of the two rivers, the Kama and the Volga.

A few hours later, our boat made a stop at Ulyanovsk, formerly Simbirsk, but renamed after Lenin, whose real name was Ulyanov. I would have liked to see the house where he was born but I could not do so as it was 3 a.m. when the boat stopped.

In the morning we rose into a scene of great beauty. The Novo-devichi (New Maiden) hills came into view, to be followed soon by the more famous Zhiguli Hills. With their dense forests, sharp escarpments and deep ravines, formerly infested by the Volga robbers, these hills did indeed look picturesque. They were only 1200 feet high but somehow looked considerably higher. They completely dominated Little Mother Volga and even compelled her to change her course. She had so far been flowing freely in a southerly direction. At Stavropol, the Zhiguli hills compelled her to describe a sharp hairpin curve to the west and, at Kuibyshev, back to the east. This is how the Bow of Samara has been formed; and it was the most beautiful part of the river, to see which alone the trip would have been worth while. It is here that the Kuibyshev Dam has been built, and it is here that the

Samara river enters the Volga, quietly and proudly, like a peasant girl who is summoned to the bed of her feudal lord

At Kuibyshev, formerly Samara, we halted for two hours. The Secretary of the State Council met me. It was kind of him to have done so, especially as the Kuibyshevians had been playing a football match against a team from Brazil. There can be no greater privation to a Russian than to miss a football match.

The Secretary drove me round and showed me the sights of the city—the new embankment on which trees were being planted, the new bridge over the Samara river, the Square of the Revolution, the Palace of Culture, the Opera House, the house in which Lenin lived and worked for a time, and the statue of Chapayev, a general who fought the counter-revolutionaries and the Czechs who had occupied this town during the Civil War. I asked the Secretary when the town was founded. In 1576, he said

‘Are there any monuments of the Tsarist period?’ I asked

‘None,’ he replied

‘None at all?’

‘No, none at all, except a wooden double-storied house in which the Governor of Kuibyshev used to live in the summer.’

Evidently he had not heard of, or did not care to recognize, the cathedral bearing the name of the great Russian hero Alexander Nevsky, which was built by Zhiber in 1894, or the monument of Alexander II by Sherwood in 1889, showing a peasant, a Bulgarian, a Circassian and an Asian—the peasant to signify the abolition of serfdom, the Bulgarian to represent the emancipation of the Bulgar Slavs from Turkish rule, the Circassian to show the conquest of the Caucasus, and the Asian to recall the extension of Russian rule into Central Asia. Evidently these events meant nothing to my guide. For him Russian, and perhaps human, history began in 1917.

THE UTOPIA OF ELECTRICIANS

DURING this trip I felt again and again that I was travelling on a lagoon and not on a river. Parts of the Volga reminded me of the lovely lagoons of Travancore on which I used to sail in my childhood. But while the lagoons of Travancore are formed by the intrusion of the sea, the lagoons here are formed by the

transformation of the river into a 'sea', or rather a series of 'seas', the Moscow Sea, the Gorki Sea, the Kuibyshev Sea, the Stalingrad Sea, and so on.

For two days we sailed through the Kuibyshev Sea. It stretches for 800 kilometres along the Volga and 500 kilometres up the Kama and is 15,000 square kilometres in extent. At Kazan it is 11 kilometres wide and at Ulyanovsk 20 kilometres. While approaching Stavropol we saw how this reservoir had been formed. We saw a dam 5 kilometres long and 40 metres high, with a spill-way, 1.5 kilometres long and 35 metres high, and two locks for the passage of ships. It has raised the water level of the Volga by 25 metres.

Not far from Stalingrad we saw another dam under construction. This is to be as long as the Kuibyshev dam and 8 metres higher and will raise the level of the Volga by 26 metres.

The Kuibyshev and Stalingrad dams are part of the Great Volga Scheme which was formulated in 1930. Other projects which form part of this scheme are the Gorki Project, which has raised the level of the river by 26 metres, and the Cheboksary and the Saratov Projects which have been included in the present Five-Year Plan.

The objects of the Great Volga Scheme are to create a deep-water route fit for seagoing vessels along the entire course of the river, to irrigate areas ridden by drought, and to generate electricity. The total capacity of the Volga Cascade is to be 12 million kilowatts. The Gorki Hydro-electric Station has a capacity of 500,000 kilowatts. This is comparatively small, and yet it is producing more current than all the power stations in Russia put together produced before the Revolution. The Cheboksary and Saratov stations, which were to be completed by 1960, will have a capacity of 800,000 and one million kilowatts respectively. The capacity of the Kuibyshev Plant is 2.1 million kilowatts and of the Stalingrad Plant, 2.3 million. Even these will be eclipsed by the proposed power stations in Siberia—the Bratskaya on the Angara and the Krasnodarskaya on the Yenisei, each of which will have a capacity of 3.2 million kilowatts.

The rate at which electricity has been, and is being, developed in the Soviet Union is baffling to the imagination. In 1920, the output of electricity in the Soviet Union was half a billion kilowatt hours. By 1940, it had risen to 48 billion; by 1955,

to 166 billion, and the target for 1960 is 365 billion kilowatt hours. In one day, the Soviet Union now generates as much electricity as was produced in the whole year 1920. In less than four decades the USSR has advanced from the fifteenth to the second place in the world in the production of electricity.

Lenin once defined communism as 'socialism plus electrification'. After an interview with Lenin, H. G. Wells wrote as follows in his book *Russia in the Shadows*, regarding Lenin's grandiose ideas for the electrification of Russia: 'Lenin who, like a good orthodox Marxist, denounces all "Utopias", has succumbed at last to a Utopia, the Utopia of electricians. Can one imagine a more courageous project in a vast, flat land of forests and illiterate peasants, with no water power, with no technical skill available, and with trade and industry at the last gasp? One can imagine such projects as successful in highly-developed industrial countries. But their application to Russia is an altogether greater strain upon the constructive imagination. I cannot see anything of the sort happening in this dark crystal of Russia, but this little man at the Kremlin can.'

The dream of 'the little man at the Kremlin' has been fulfilled and overfulfilled.

THE STEPPE

TOWARDS the end of our journey we entered the region of the steppe. For twenty-four hours the hills had been getting smaller and smaller and the trees more and more scarce. And then there stretched as far as the eye could see a vast expanse of light brown soil on which nothing grew but bushes. And for miles together even bushes were absent. I had prepared myself for this scenery by reading Chekhov's story, 'The Steppe'. Even that poem in prose did not reconcile me to the infinite inhospitality of this region.

Climatically we seemed to have passed suddenly from the temperate to the torrid zone. Indeed during the first two days of our voyage, when there was no sun and the sky was overcast, the cold was intemperate. But after the Bow of Samara the whole aspect changed. Saratov was warm, Stalingrad was hot, and

Astrakhan was said to be blazing in the sun. The parched steppe seemed to be waiting for rain like a spinster with a dried-up heart who waits eternally for love. Now and then the steppe looked at a few fleeting clouds; they passed and it relapsed into its everlasting sterility.

After Volsk, we passed through a number of towns which used to bear German and Swiss names—Basel, Marxstadt, Schaffhausen, Glarus, Lucerne, Susental and Katherinenstadt, which was founded by a Dutch baron, Beauregard. Those names are no longer in use: the only two which have survived are those which bear the honoured names of Marx and Engels. The towns are still however reminiscent of the former German colonies which Catherine the Great established in this region in the second half of the eighteenth century. Evidently she thought that the laborious German genius might turn even this arid region to the service of man. She gave the Germans special privileges and organized a separate Ministry, called the Guardian Office, to look after their interests. In 1914 there was a solid block of 400,000 German settlers here. During the First World War they came under a cloud, but soon after the war the communists, in their enthusiasm for establishing a multinational State, established a separate autonomous Volga-German Republic. In the Second World War the loyalty of the Germans to the Soviet Government again came under suspicion. They were therefore uprooted and expelled to the east and the Volga-German Autonomous Republic was abrogated on the eve of the great battle of Stalingrad. There is however a distinct German strain in the inhabitants of these parts. One day when we were at lunch, a strapping girl with the bluest of blue eyes walked into the restaurant, distracting our attention even from the delicious strawberries we had been enjoying.

Our boat sailed fast, disdainful of even such towns as Marx and Engels. She, however, stopped for two hours at Saratov, which was founded in the second half of the sixteenth century. It is now an important railway junction, with a 400-kilometre line running to Uralsk in the east and a 600-kilometre line to Astrakhan in the south. Formerly a backward agricultural region, it has become a flourishing industrial centre producing tractors, automobiles, ball-bearings and harvester-combines. We drove round the town and found a street, a square, a statue, a museum

and a university, all bearing the name of Chernishevsky, a radical leader of the nineteenth century whom the Tsar had put in prison for 27 years and released just in time for him to lay his bones in his native town. The only older object was a pink and green Trinity cathedral, built in baroque style.

Stalingrad was the next town at which our boat condescended to stop. The heat was intense and a scorching wind was blowing. I had been to Stalingrad three times and was inclined to stay put in my cabin but decided to go out for an hour for the sake of Valia who had never been there before. The city had grown since my last visit, it was also looking greener. More trees had been planted and more lawns laid out. Even the Mamai Hill was beginning to recover from the scars of war, and a new war memorial had been erected. Only the house which Pavlov defended to the death for 40 days had been left intact as a reminder of one of the thousand acts of heroism by which Stalingrad saved the Soviet Union.

An hour after we left Stalingrad we passed a gigantic statue of Stalin at the entrance to the Volga-Don Canal. At the very moment when we were passing this statue, and I was thinking of the caprice of Fate, of the vicissitudes of history, of the destruction, last autumn, of a similar statue which had stood at the entrance to the Suez Canal and of the destruction of Stalin's own statue in Budapest, the ship's loudspeaker blared out the announcement that the hair cutting saloon would be open till 6, the restaurant till 11 and the bar till 12!

We then passed through what is known as the Caspian Depression. At Saratov the Volga descended to the level of the sea, now she flowed below sea level, and at Astrakhan we were 65 feet below the level of the sea. This depression is part of an inland sea which existed millions of years ago, and of which the present Caspian Sea is a relic. This accounts for the crust of salt by which vast stretches of soil are covered. There are sand dunes and salt lakes, such as those at Elton and Baskunchak. There is a total absence of vegetation, and the steppe has become a desert.

The Volga too seems to feel the monotony of it all. She has come a long way from her source, Lake Selgar. The longest river in Europe, she has travelled over 3,000 kilometres. A number of companions had joined her and lost their identity in her—the Oka, the Kama, the Sura, the Sviyaga and the Samara.

She had nourished Kingdoms and Khanates on her banks; they are gone, she remains. Poets have sung her praise, artists have painted her picture and lovers have found comfort in each other on her banks or release from each other in her waters. And now, a new type of man, with monstrous machines, has appeared, trying to order her about, regulate her, control her, make her rise and fall, and go hither and thither in obedience to his will. In the earlier stages of her journey, forests used to flank her, woods waved and smiled to her and hills tried to waylay her and, not succeeding, let her go. The last to take liberties with her was the Zwingli mountain which wrenched her, like some fierce ideology, first to the left and then to the right. At Sizran, she freed herself from the clutches of the Zwingli mountain and resumed her steady southern course. But now she seems rather weary of it all. She has lost something of her former gaiety and ebullience. She has no more companions to play with; the hills and woods have deserted her; she has nothing to rest her eyes on except the dreary steppe. Alone, unfriended and melancholy, the Volga has come to the end of all things, nothing. Just as a man who, having tasted all philosophies and found them all unsatisfying, commends his soul to the Infinite, so also the Volga, serene but resigned, would soon merge her being in the Caspian Sea and find her Nirvana there.

SIBERIA

THE TRANS SIBERIAN ROUTE

IN 1958 we had a race with spring in different parts of the Soviet Union. In April, when Moscow was still in the grip of winter and there was no sign of a thaw, the doctors sent me off to the Crimea after an attack of pneumonia. There spring had arrived already, it was beginning to touch the trees and plants into life and leafage. In the beginning of May, we returned to Moscow for a few days in connexion with President Nasser's visit and found that nature was still asleep. We went back to the Crimea, where spring had given way to summer and the roses were in full bloom. In the beginning of June, we returned to Moscow. Moscow too had embraced summer, after no more than a flirtation with spring, only to relapse a few days later into a cold spell when the temperature dropped to zero. From the vagaries of the Moscow weather we escaped to Siberia, where nature was arrayed in all the glory of spring.

It was good to plan a trip to Siberia from the Crimea, to the coast of the Pacific from the shores of the Black Sea. It made me ponder over the vastness of the Soviet Union. We had planned a three weeks' trip from Moscow to Vladivostok, but owing to the arrival of the King of Nepal and a delegation from India, we had to split it into two parts and reserve the Soviet Far East for a future journey.

On 11 June we flew in a jet plane from Moscow soon after midnight and reached Sverdlovsk in the Urals two hours later. Sverdlovsk used to be called Yekaterinburg, it was here that the last of the Tsars and his family were assassinated. After an hour's halt we flew to Novossibirsk which we reached 5 hours after leaving Moscow. A journey by train would have taken three days. At Novossibirsk we advanced our watches by four hours. From Novossibirsk we went to Irkutsk by train and, after spending three days there, on to Chita. The train journey from Novossibirsk to Chita took 62 hours. From Chita, we flew back to Moscow, a distance of over 6,000 kilometres.

Soon after leaving Moscow at midnight, we saw an unearthly sunrise over the clouds. Of the earth itself we saw nothing. We must have flown over Gorki, formerly Nizhni Novgorod; Kazan, the capital of a Tartar kingdom for three centuries; Molotov, now called Perm; Tyumen, the oldest city in Siberia, founded in 1585; and Omsk, erected as a fortress in the eighteenth century on the Irtysh river. The Irtysh joins the Ob beyond Omsk and together they turn northwards and enter the Arctic Ocean through the Kara Sea. We crossed the Ob over a fine bridge in Novossibirsk. Novossibirsk, however, was a closed city and we saw nothing of it except an imposing railway station and a magnificent opera house which, I was told, was even bigger than the Bolshoi in Moscow and had a repertoire of 47 operas and 17 ballets. In 1897, when the Trans-Siberian railway was being built, it was a small railroad town. Now it is a city with many industries and a population of 750,000. From here the Trans-Siberian railway goes to the Altai Region and to Central Asia. In 1941, about half a million Germans from the former Volga Republic were moved to Altai, just as the Tartars were moved from their homeland in the Crimea and scattered in the remote areas of the USSR, because they had helped the Germans to overrun the Crimea. Even the Tartar towns in the Crimea have been rechristened, with the exception of Balaclava, Bakhchisarai and Dhankoy. Mrs Sohlman, the charming wife of the doyen of our diplomatic corps, had spent her childhood with her father in the Crimea. She told me that she still remembered places with such Tartar names as Kizil Tash (red stone), a mountain near Yalta; Mohammed Sultan where, in the old days, people used to change horses on their way from Simferopol to Yalta; Chamli Burun (forest mountain) and Hush Haya (a nomad tent). All these picturesque names have ceased to exist.

At Novossibirsk, we entered the Moscow-Vladivostok train. It takes 8 days and 8 hours to cover the distance from Moscow to Vladivostok. On our first day in the train we passed through a vast and limitless plain. There were no cuttings or embankments. The train did not seem to be in a hurry; it did not rush through the countryside, as our Grand Trunk Express or the Deccan Queen does, making the trees fly and the villages disappear like dots. The Trans-Siberian train's motion had something of

the quality of the Russian occupation of Siberia which proceeded, for a whole century,

with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy

Russia occupied Tobolsk in 1587, Tomsk in 1604, Chita in 1638 and Kamchatka in 1697.

The whole of our first day in the train was spent in Western Siberia, a vast region of one million square miles lying between the Urals in the west and the Yenisei in the east, Kazakhstan in the south and the Arctic Ocean in the north. Its population is only 10 million or 10 per square mile. A fertile agricultural region, it was a godsend during the war when the other great agricultural region of the USSR, the Ukraine, was occupied by the Germans. Herds of cattle could be seen everywhere; and Western Siberia could be relied on for the supply of meat, milk and butter.

Leaving the Novossibirsk Oblast, we entered the Kemerovo Oblast which has been recently carved out of it. It contains the famous Kuznets region which American correspondents have called 'the Soviet Mid-west'. What makes it so rich is the existence of a coal basin, the reserves of which have been estimated at 900 billion tons. Lying near the surface and in thick seams, the coal here is cheaper to extract than the coal of the Donets Basin. In the first Five Year Plan, the Ural-Kuznets combine was formed in order to develop the iron of the Urals with the aid of the coal of the Kuznets, but now with the discovery of iron ore in Western Siberia and of coal in Karaganda each region has become self sufficient. In the centre of the Kuznets basin is Stalinsk, a town which almost rivals Magnitogorsk in the production of iron and steel. It was about this town that the poet Mayakovsky exclaimed

In a few years' time
This glade of boggy soil
Will be a garden city

With open hearths
Of a hundred sun power
We shall light up Siberia

We reached Krasnoyarsk on the morning after our departure from Novossibirsk. Here we crossed the Yenisei river just as we had crossed the Ob at Novossibirsk. These two rivers, together with the Lena, constitute a colossal system of water transport, supplementing the Trans-Siberian railroad which serves only the extreme south of Siberia.

We now entered Eastern Siberia, which stretches from the Arctic Ocean in the north to China and Mongolia in the south, from the Yenisei in the west to the Maritime Province in the east. Eastern Siberia was far more refreshing to the eye than Western. The countryside was no longer monotonously flat. It was a region of hills and plateaus covered with trees. There was a railway station called Taiga, appropriately named because it was surrounded by dense forests known as *taiga*. We saw a large number of goods trains loaded with timber; and logs of wood heaped in piles could be seen everywhere. Eastern Siberia is the principal supplier of lumber in the USSR. Equally valuable are the furs and gold of Eastern Siberia. We passed a town called Marinsk where gold is produced along the Kiya riverside. The most important gold-producing area, however, is the Yakutsk ASSR, a vast region which is as large as India and yet has a population of only 400,000 against our 400 million.

On the 14th of June, that is, within three days of leaving Moscow, we reached Irkutsk. Before the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway in 1905, this trip would have taken a whole year. This is how Chekhov, who in 1890 undertook a journey to distant Sakhalin, 'The Island of Lost Souls', in order to get over the pangs of his unrequited love for Lydia Avilov, has described it:

This road is the longest and, it seems, the worst in the entire world. It is hard to travel on it, very hard; but it becomes all the more difficult when you realize that this rutty strip of earth, this black pock-marked trail, is the only artery linking Europe with Siberia. And along this artery, we are told, civilization flows eastward. Impossible mud, water, boggy ruts, detours, tumble-down bridges, wayside inns with bedbugs and vermin, evil smells and foul language.

We cannot but admire the spirit of adventure which possessed the Russian pioneers who, braving the hardships of this tremendous journey, travelled right across Siberia to Sakhalin, crossed

the Bering Strait, named it after one of them, and went to Alaska, which belonged to Russia for 150 years. Russian traders even appeared in California in 1812. Perhaps the Russian River which I saw when I attended the San Francisco Conference in 1945 is now the only reminder of Russian penetration into California at the beginning of the last century.

IRKUTSK AND LAKE BAIKAL

ALFRED GONSALVES was disappointed with our Siberian trip. Central Asia had spoiled him. He accompanied me to Central Asia last year and wherever we went, in Tashkent, Frunze and Alma Ata, we were treated as State guests. In Siberia too he had expected that the City Fathers would receive us, show us round and entertain us to huge banquets. His first shock of disillusionment came at Novossibirsk where an airport official received us, took us to a decorated room with a table laden with food and drinks, and introduced us to our 'hostess', a large woman who tempted us to help ourselves liberally to such Siberian dishes as *piliment* and then presented us with a bill as fat as herself. Our transport from the airport to the railway station in Novossibirsk cost almost as much as our railway ticket from Novossibirsk to Irkutsk. What annoyed Alfred most was that the taxi driver charged us not only for our journey but his journey back, and he was worried that the 10,000 roubles he had taken with him might not be sufficient for this trip. At Irkutsk there was no one to receive us, we had to wait at the railway station for more than half an hour before a sleepy, unkempt Intourist official came and took us to the airport hotel. The next day, on our way to Lake Baikal, our chauffeur picked a few flowers from the jungle and chivalrously presented them to Anujee. He apologized for the lack of fragrance and quoted a Siberian proverb, 'In Siberia flowers have no smell and women are cold'. Alfred thought that the men were certainly cold.

As for Siberian women, the only one with whom we came into close contact was Zhenia, the head of Intourist in Irkutsk. No one has tested whether she is cold or not, for she is still unmarried, but she was certainly most competent. Zhenia was one of those

women to whom you felt that you could safely entrust yourself in a foreign country. We told her that while in Irkutsk we would like to see Lake Baikal and the hydro-electric dam on the Angara and that for the rest she could do with us exactly as she liked. She suggested that we might begin with a tour of the city and took us to a two-hundred-year-old church on the banks of the Irkut river. It was one of the two churches which are functioning out of the eighteen in the time of the Tsars. We thought it strange that a communist guide should have taken us to a church first, but soon knew why she did so. She stopped in front of a grave just outside the church and said that there lay Mme Trubitskaya and her three children, all of whom died in infancy. Trubitski, the husband, was one of the leaders of the Decembrist movement who, together with other patriots like Prince Volkonsky, were exiled to Irkutsk by the Tsar. The wives insisted on accompanying their husbands, despite the terrors of Siberia, and Nekrassov has written a poem in their praise called 'Russian Women'.

Among other radicals and revolutionaries imprisoned in Irkutsk were Safroni, a priest who protested against serfdom and feudalism; Radischev the writer; Dubovsky and other Polish patriots who rose against Tsarist oppression (our guide did not say Russian rule) in 1861; and, in our own days, Dzerzhinsky, Kuibyshev, Frunze, Stalin and Molotov, who is now again in dignified exile not far from Irkutsk.

The tortures to which the prisoners in Siberia were subjected are shown in a museum, some 65 kilometres from Irkutsk. In Tsarist days there was here a branch of the fortress of Peter and Paul in St Petersburg, where political prisoners were confined. I could not help wondering whether at some future date some guide would not relate equally vividly the tortures inflicted on political prisoners in Stalin's days. The communists would call them counter-revolutionaries, while the Tsars called *their* victims revolutionaries. It must be said, however, to the credit of Stalin's successors that they have closed down the concentration camps in Siberia; and the number of men who have been set free runs into hundreds of thousands.

Irkutsk is one of the oldest towns in Siberia. Among the monuments which were shown to us there was a statue in honour of Shelikhov, 'the Russian Columbus', who discovered Alaska.

This memorial was built in marble from the Urals. The marble had to be dragged by horses right through Siberia and cost 11,760 roubles, a fantastic sum in those days. While dwelling on the greatness of the explorer of Alaska, our guide also dwelt on the stupidity of the Tsar who sold this rich and strategic region to the United States Government for 7 million dollars in 1867.

Our main purpose in going to Irkutsk was to see Lake Baikal. We left Irkutsk by car on the morning of the 15th at about 9 and, as soon as we set out, saw the Irkut river falling into the Angara. Then we saw a brand-new town rising round an aluminium factory. This town is to be called Shelikhov after 'the Russian Columbus'. Then I somehow went to sleep. When I woke up a few minutes later, I thought I was still dreaming, for I was in taiga-land. All around me was the taiga, deep, dark, virginal, mysterious, impenetrable. The taiga seemed to hem us in on all sides. It encroached on the road and threatened our onward passage, for on the horizon were ranges of hills, all covered with taiga. Nowhere, not even in India, have I seen forests of such density and immensity. The forests in my own Travancore or Mysore or the Central Provinces are indeed magnificent, but there would be other things than trees to divert one's attention, such as ferns and shrubs, rivulets and waterfalls. Here there was nothing but trees, they stood so closely together that they blotted out the sun and the sky. The trees were all of one or two kinds—pine and birch, birch and pine and an occasional fir and cedar. Here nature has behaved like an artist who produces an impression by using just one colour, or a conjurer who casts a spell on you by reciting the same *mantra* over and over again.

Thus flanked by the taiga we drove for a hundred kilometres. Suddenly the taiga parted and Lake Baikal lay at our feet, a gem among the surrounding hills. We drove down to the shore of the lake and were given a hearty welcome by the Fishermen's Collective. Demin Victor, the President of the Collective, invited us to lunch in the house of one of the members, a wizened old woman who was an expert cook. We had lunch consisting of fish soup, fish cakes, fried fish, steamed fish and cold fish. The Baikal has many varieties of fish which are not known anywhere else. Each fish course was followed by a glass of vodka and a toast, in proposing which Victor showed as much gusto as in drinking vodka. I was astonished to see how well-informed he

was. In the course of our talk, I told him that my home was in Kerala, which was well-known in the Soviet Union as the only Communist State in India. He was too tactful to show any special interest in Kerala; he merely said that he presumed that I belonged to the Indian National Congress. No, I said, though I believed in it. Victor agreed that it was the Congress that had fought for and stood for the freedom of India and he proposed a toast for the third time to Jawaharlal Nehru. Speaking of the USA, Victor said that he thought that Lippmann was the wisest of all American political correspondents; Victor had no use for Lawrence or Margaret Higgins or the Alsop Brothers. He said that he had once praised Lippmann to an American visitor and been told that Lippmann did not count at all in America. 'So much the worse for America,' said Victor—a sentiment which I am inclined to endorse.

After lunch, Victor took us for a cruise on the lake. Fortunately it was a calm day, for cruising on the lake is dangerous when winds from different directions—known as Kultuk, Burguzin and Sarma—cross each other. Then the lake would be like a raging sea. On the day on which we sailed on it however Baikal was like the Lake of Innisfree, and the water was so transparent that one could almost see the bottom. Victor spoke in superlatives about the lake. It was the deepest lake in the world, 5,710 feet. Its water was absolutely transparent, and he demonstrated this by making us throw a coin into the lake and watch it sink. It was also the coldest lake in the world. When we were cruising on it we had to wrap ourselves in mufflers and overcoats, for the temperature of the water was only 8° whereas the temperature in Irkutsk was 32°. Geologists say that Lake Baikal was once connected with the Arctic and was later separated from it by some terrible terrestrial disturbance. There are many hot springs around the lake; and 75 per cent of the fauna and flora there are peculiar to it, so much so that the lake has been called the Museum of Living Fossils. Seals abound; and there is a strange viviparous fish called the *golomyanka* which lives at a great depth, reproduces its young alive and is encased in a thick layer of fat, so much so that when it rises to the surface it melts and runs in the sun. Three hundred and thirty-six streams flow into the lake but only one flows out, and this has given rise to a beautiful legend.

Once there lived an old man called Baikal who had 335 sons, but only one daughter called Angara. When she grew up into a beautiful girl a seagull brought to her the news of a fine young man called Yenisei who was anxious to marry her, but her father would not let her go. Therefore, on a dark night, the Angara rushed out, and on seeing her escape, Baikal caught hold of the nearest cliff and hurled it at her. The cliff struck the earth in front of Angara and can still be seen. On and on fled Angara until she flung herself into the arms of her waiting lover, Yenisei.

This is the legend as it exists among the Buryat-Mongols whose home used to be in the Baikal region. I have also read an American version of this legend, according to which Angara was not the daughter but the young wife of old Baikal, who was intensely jealous of her and sought to prevent her from going to her lover, Yenisei, by hurling a cliff at her. This reminded me of a case which I tried in Peshawar, of a woman who went out of her husband's bed at midnight on the pretext of answering the call of nature, and seeing that she did not return for an unconscionably long time, her husband went out, found her in the arms of her lover, and hurled a stone which killed them both on the spot.

Angara was too full of energy to submit to Baikal's will, but what Baikal could not do is now being accomplished by Soviet technicians. The Angara is being tamed. We visited the hydro electric project in process of construction on the outskirts of Irkutsk. A dam, 2.4 kilometres long and 64 metres high, is being built across the Angara. This would raise the water-level of the river by 30 metres, and the resulting reservoir would extend from Irkutsk to Lake Baikal. A number of islands in the river have already disappeared, and the villages have been moved elsewhere. The hydro-electric station is to have eight turbines, each of 82 000 kilowatts, the seventh turbine went into production on the day of our visit.

A more ambitious project is planned on the Angara at Bratsk, with a capacity of 3 600,000 kw. The construction of another hydro electric station, with a capacity of 4 million kw, has already started at Krasnoyarsk on the Yenisei, and the Soviet Government have under consideration a still more fabulous project on the Yenisei, producing 7 million kilowatts. Thus not only the impetuous Angara but her majestic spouse, the Yenisei, is being harnessed to the service of man.

THE BURYAT-MONGOL ASSR

WE left Irkutsk on 17 June by train for Chita and saw the Irkut river joining the Angara. About this too the Mongols have a legend. Irkut heard from a seagull that Baikal had a beautiful daughter called Angara. He therefore raced down in a south-easterly direction to meet her. When he was within reach of Baikal, he heard that Angara had left her home and was on her way to meet her lover, Yenisei. Undaunted, Irkut suddenly turned northwards and joined Angara near Irkutsk and, losing himself in her, went on to the Arctic. The Mongols must be a people with a romantic imagination to have invented such legends.

For eight hours our train ran along the shore of Lake Baikal. It seemed to hug the lake for most of the time; occasionally, it would move away and look at the lake through the leaves of the trees, as a lover looks at his beloved through a lattice window. Sometimes the train would go off in a huff and puff and let off smoke in the tunnels through the mountains, but always, desolate and sick of an old passion, it would come back to the lake and see it breaking into ripples of laughter.

Rarely have I enjoyed a journey by train so much as this. To our left was the lake, wearing different colours but always transparently clear and making low sounds on the white pebbles on her shore. To our right were high mountains, still with patches of snow. From these mountains flowed innumerable streams which we crossed every few minutes. And all around there was the eternal taiga.

We travelled from Irkutsk to Chita in an international waggon on the train bound for Peking from Moscow. On the day on which we travelled, the waggon was truly international; among the passengers were Indians, Chinese, Russians, Koreans and Mongols. Alfred shared his compartment with a Korean and Nanavati formed the acquaintance of a Mongol. Both the Korean and the Mongol were unusually communicative; though both belonged to communist states, their outlook was quite different. The Korean was a fervent believer in Marxism as the only gospel for the salvation of mankind. For the non-communist world he had nothing but hatred. He was no believer

in co existence, he simply could not understand how a country like India could seek technical assistance from the USA as well as from the USSR. We tried to explain that we had our own philosophy of life and our own system of government and that, in developing our industries, we saw nothing wrong in availing ourselves of technical and financial assistance from whichever quarter it came, provided no political strings were attached to it. But no amount of explanation would convince the Korean that this attitude was correct or feasible.

Very different was our Mongol companion. Almost his first words were 'All these beautiful places, the lake and everything around it, used to be ours, but China took off one big slice, and Russia another, and we are left with the rest. But it looks as if what has been left to us will remain with us'. He referred to the terrible and repeated purges to which the Mongols were subjected in Stalin's time. He spoke of a friend whose one crime was that he had studied abroad. For this he was put in prison for many years and had just been released. Before his arrest, he had had no strong political views but now he was a bitter and determined enemy of communism. Our Mongol companion admitted however that under Khrushchev the Soviet attitude had improved. Some time ago, Khrushchev visited Ulan Ude, the capital of Buryat Mongolia. He reopened the cases of a thousand Mongols who had been imprisoned in Stalin's days and found that only two had been rightly convicted. Khrushchev ordered the rest to be released, and compensation was paid to the relatives of many who had died in the meantime.

Mongol nationalism has always been a factor for Russia to reckon with. It took the Russians more than half a century to subdue the Buryat Mongols. Lured by the existence of gold and silver in the region of the Baikal Lake, the Russians appeared there first in 1627 and built a fort in Bratsk in 1631. The Mongols murdered the entire Russian garrison in 1635. There followed a number of punitive expeditions by the Cossacks and a fort was built at Irkutsk in 1661. It was not until 1685 that the Russians gained complete control over this region.

Even after the Revolution, the Russians remembered the strength of the nationalism of the Mongols and split them into two. One part of their territory was incorporated into the Russian, and the other into the Far Eastern Republic. In 1923 however Stalin

ordered their amalgamation into a single Autonomous Republic, despite the protest of local party leaders. Himself belonging to a minority among Soviet peoples, Stalin could appreciate the strength of national sentiment better than many of his comrades. At first, when the Trotskyite dreams of turning the world red were in the air, the Soviet Government appears to have entertained hopes of winning the allegiance of Mongols everywhere through the Buryat Mongols. They even encouraged Buddhism; they discovered that the religion of Buddha was a kind of atheism and therefore not inconsistent with communism. In fact, the philosophy of Buddhism does go beyond God, but the communists were incapable of realizing that it was one thing to go beyond God, another to go against Him. Anyhow, the flirtation with Buddhism did not last long. It was soon denounced as inconsistent with proletarian internationalism. At present, Buddhism is tolerated, though not encouraged. Similarly the Soviet attitude towards Geser, the legendary hero of the Mongols, also changed. At one time his legend was encouraged and a Russian translation of the epic of Geser was published, but later it was condemned as the glorification of the cult of personality in its worst form.

We reached Ulan Ude, the capital of the Buryat Mongol ASSR, on the evening of the 17th of June. Ulan Ude, and indeed the whole of the Buryat Mongol ASSR, is a closed area. We were therefore unable to stay there. In Ulan Ude and in the other stations at which the train stopped we found that the people were mostly Russians, not Mongols. The systematic migration of Russians to this region has reduced the Mongols to a minority. Buryat Mongolia, like other parts of the Soviet Union, has undoubtedly benefited from the Soviet policy of promoting education and industrialization. Some backward-looking Mongols however must still be sympathizing with their poet, Solbone Tuya, who wrote a few years ago:

No, keep your overcrowded cities
With their sophisticated air.
Guileless and free, I need the country,
The cool wind, blowing through my hair.
Give me the steppe, limitless, wind-swept,
Its vastness, stretching on each side,
Where, free from orders and surveillance,
Man's goodness is his only guide.

The journey from Irkutsk to Chita was the most jerky one I had ever experienced. The train performed as many motions as a ship does on the sea, it seemed to roll and pitch and toss from side to side. In the morning it fulfilled the function of my masseuse in the sanatorium in the Crimea, it promoted the circulation of my blood without my having to do anything at all. And in the evening it rocked me, like an ungentle nurse, to sleep. So well did I sleep despite, or perhaps because of, the movements of the train that I was barely awake when we reached our destination, Chita, at 6 a.m.

Chita used to be the capital of the Far Eastern Republic in the early days of the Revolution. It was far less industrialized than Irkutsk and was therefore much cleaner and pleasanter. All around Chita was a belt of mountains which did not dominate Chita but seemed to hold it in their hands. We drove out of Chita for about 50 kilometres along the road to Vladivostok and had a lovely view of the Ingoda river. Another road takes one in 6 or 7 hours to the Sino Soviet frontier. The vicinity of China was obvious. The carpets in our luxurious room, with green wallpaper, blue cushions and pink curtains, were Chinese. The delicious apples which we tasted in a restaurant in Chita were also Chinese. In the train there was a Chinese as well as a Russian menu and at the frontier, we were told that the Russian cook would be replaced by a Chinese cook. We also heard of a Chinese collective farm and thought of visiting it, but we gave up the idea when we heard that, though it used to be worked by the Chinese, there were no longer any Chinese on that farm. Chita was such a charming spot that we were happy feasting our eyes on the hills and meadows and valleys, instead of visiting, as our guide had suggested, a school, a hospital, a soldiers' home and a factory for making compressors. These we had seen in many parts of the Soviet Union but Chita had a rustic charm to which we abandoned ourselves.

We returned from Chita to Moscow by air, a journey which should have taken only nine hours but took nineteen. Soon after leaving Chita, we saw three big lakes and some smaller ones, engraved on the ground like oval mirrors. We had hoped to obtain a fine view of Lake Baikal from the air, but there was a pall of mist and dust over the Lake. In two hours we reached Irkutsk, which was broiling in the heat. We were held up there

for a number of hours as the airport was enveloped in a dust-haze and visibility was impossible. Eventually, we flew from Irkutsk to Omsk in three hours. The captain of the plane, a triple millionaire, for he had flown three million kilometres, asked me to the cockpit of the plane. There, 30,000 feet below, lay the vast Siberian plain. Every few minutes, the great rivers of Siberia—the Angara, the Yenisei, the Ob and the Irtysh—would appear on the ground, approach us, accost us and recede. We reached Omsk, where the temperature was 35°. There we were told that the Moscow airport was closed because of rain and fog and mist, that the temperature in Moscow was down to freezing point and that the flight would be resumed in two hours. But two hours became four, and six, and eight. We were taken to a hotel where some forty camp beds had been laid out in the corridor for the passengers of the plane. Fortunately we ourselves were given a bedroom with a bath. Alfred Gonçalves, too, had a bedroom but it was full of mosquitoes which bit him so hard that in the morning his bedsheet was found to be blood-stained. At last we left Omsk and arrived in Moscow after three hours' flight at 12 noon, Moscow time, and 6 p.m., Chita time.

During our air journey we were impressed with the immensity of Siberia even more than during our train journey. Immense indeed are the distances of Siberia; so are its resources. Siberia is fast becoming the chief bastion of Soviet power. Here lies 75 per cent of the Soviet Union's coal; 80 per cent of its water-power; 80 per cent of its timber; and 65 per cent of its tin. These vast potentialities are only beginning to be exploited. If the Soviet Government attains its declared objective of 'overtaking the USA's industrial might in the shortest historical period', the credit will go largely to Siberia. Even in the nineteenth century it was vaguely known that Siberia had immense resources, but it was not until recently that a systematic attempt has been made to exploit them. In the nineteenth century Alexander Herzen, the great liberal who was banished from Russia, wrote: 'Siberia has a great future. But Siberia is thought of as a cellar in which there are large quantities of gold, furs and other wealth, but a cold cellar, a place of deep snows, a vast wilderness, empty of people and full of misery. This is untrue. It is only that the moribund Russian Government which accomplishes every-

thing by force and the knout is unable to impart that spirited impulse which could push Siberia ahead with American speed 'The Communist Government, too, has not refrained from the use of force and the knout, of which the first piece of news which assailed our ears on our arrival in Moscow, the execution of Nagy, was a grim reminder, but communism has certainly given a spirited impulse which was previously lacking and is pushing Siberia, and all USSR, ahead with more than American speed

ARMENIA

JOURNEY TO YEREVAN

EVER since I came to the Soviet Union I had been wishing to visit its southernmost Republic, Armenia. It was not until the end of my sixth year that I was able to fulfil this dream. Until Stalin's death, and for some time thereafter, Armenia and indeed the entire region of the Black Sea and the Caspian had been closed to foreigners. Even in 1958 diplomats were not allowed to visit Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, and the neighbouring zone bordering Turkey. Anujee and I however were given special permission to visit Yerevan. Just before we left Moscow, Protocol rang me up and told me that the authorities were sorry they were unable to extend this permission to Thomas Abraham, who was to have come with me. He accompanied me as far as Tbilisi and then went to Baku to meet our trainees there.

On 3 October 1958 we flew by a jet plane to Tbilisi. This journey took only two hours against eight by an ordinary plane. Hardly had we reclined in our seats after a frugal lunch, so different from the sumptuous meals served by the Air-India International, when we were told that we were passing over Rostov-on-Don. We saw Rostov and tried to trace the Volga-Don Canal on the ground when the Greater Caucasus began to appear before us. Soon we passed over them with Mt Elbrus, the highest peak in Europe, to our right and Mt Kazbek, 16,558 feet high, to our left. Both were covered with snow, Elbrus fully and Kazbek almost fully. Distracting our attention from both was a dazzling Georgian girl whom Anujee spotted and pointed out to me as soon as we entered the plane. She turned out to be our hostess. Flying at a height of 25,000 feet in an under-pressurized plane we were feeling drowsy, but we were determined to keep awake lest we should miss, even for a moment, the beauty of Mts Elbrus and Kazbek and of that Georgian girl.

We left Tbilisi by train at about 8 p.m. and were due to reach Yerevan at 6.30 in the morning. I woke up an hour earlier and looked out. The dawn was breaking and the objects of nature were just becoming visible. We seemed to be on an elevated treeless plateau which reminded me of my journey across the Roof of the World. Suddenly a veritable apparition of a mountain sprang up on the horizon. It was the Biblical mountain, Ararat. Mt Ararat was free from snow and ice except for a layer at the top which made it look as if it was wearing a white Turk cap. Ararat, 16,945 feet high, was lower than Elbrus, but in its lonely majesty it was even more impressive. Elbrus and Kazbek had their peers, though not quite so outstanding as themselves, the 'rule of collectivity' seemed to prevail in the Caucasus. The position of Mt Elbrus was rather like that of Khrushchev before Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich and Zhukov had been purged. But Ararat was a veritable Stalin among mountains. Or, since it is now in Turkey, it might be more appropriate to compare it to the Sultan of Turkey, and by his side was Little Ararat, looking like his heir apparent.

We got into conversation with our neighbours in the train, an Armenian doctor and his wife, who were travelling to their homeland from Moscow after the lapse of nearly a quarter of a century. Pointing to Mt Ararat, Mrs Zargarian told us that it used to be in Russian territory, after the First World War all that region, including Kars and Ardahan, which had belonged to Russia before the war was seized by Turkey. The young Soviet Republic had its own troubles and was unable to oppose Turkey, and the Kars and Ardahan valley was the price which Lenin had to pay to have a friendly neighbour in the south. Mrs Zargarian pointed out the river Aras, which was now the boundary between Turkey and the USSR, and told us that the land on the Turkish side of the river was much richer than on the Soviet side.

THE ARMENIAN TRAGEDY

IN Yerevan we were accommodated in a newly constructed, seven-storied hotel in the centre of the city. On our arrival in the hotel, we noticed a large crowd of people standing at the entrance. One of them, a very old woman, half blind, asked us

whether we had come from Los Angeles. We said 'No' and passed on. Our Armenian guide explained to us that these people had come in order to see whether any of their relations, from whom they had been separated for decades, were amongst the visitors to the hotel. I suspected that he was trying to pull our legs; it seemed to me that the people crowding in front of the hotel had come out of curiosity to see foreigners or perhaps in the hope of getting something from the American tourists who had come to Yerevan. Subsequently we discovered that our guide was speaking no more than the truth.

One day a well-dressed and handsome American woman accosted me in the lift to the sixth floor where we were staying and told us that she was Armenian by birth and that she would very much like to have my autograph. Later on, when we were going down to lunch, we saw her in front of the restaurant. I introduced her to Anujee and asked her to join us at lunch. Anujee did not like this. She has a notion, compounded of Indian puritanism, English etiquette and feminine jealousy, that any foreign woman who talks unIntroduced to her husband is an adventuress, especially if she is good-looking.

At lunch our companion related her history. She was born in Armenia during the First World War when it was part of Turkey. Her father was killed during the massacres of 1920, and her mother thereupon took her away to the USA, but left her sister behind. She had now come in search of her sister and to her great joy had managed to find her. Our companion was typically American. She had brought her iron all the way from America by air to press her clothes in the Soviet Union. I expressed my surprise that she should have done so, for after all people in the Soviet Union were not so particular about the clothes they wore. 'But you see,' she said, 'we have been taught that to dress well is to feel well.'

This lady had also brought with her some underwear for her long-missing sister. Americans have an idea that Soviet women have no underwear. An American, married to a charming and talented Indian friend of ours, brought some nylon underwear from the USA as a present for the world-famous ballerina, Ulanova. He succeeded in having an interview with her. He kissed her feet with emotion and presented the garment to her saying, 'You can never have too many of these.' Apparently the

interpreter translated this by, 'You cannot be having many of these' Ulanova was visibly annoyed and refused to accept the gift. The American mentioned this incident to us and threw the entire blame on the interpreter. It did not strike him how incongruous it was to give a present of this kind to a woman of the standing of Ulanova.

Almost all the American Armenians were old. Some had come to see their homeland before they died, others to find their relations. One found his mother who he thought must have died long ago, she was now 97 and enjoying perfect health. There is something in the bracing highland air of Armenia which makes people live long. At the airfield and in front of our hotel it was pathetic to see groups of bedraggled men and women, showing foreigners old pictures of, or letters from, their relations and anxiously inquiring about them. This sight impressed us with the magnitude of the Armenian tragedy. Truly the sorrow of the Armenians through the ages is, as their poet Tumanyan has put it, like 'a shoreless sea'.

I had a talk with one Mongouni, a member of an American tourist group living in the same hotel as ours. He had been in the USA for 56 years and had now come to Yerevan to see his motherland before he died. He sought an interview with me in order to send a message through me to Jawaharlal Nehru. He came into my room at the appointed hour and asked if he might keep his hat on, for he had a cold. 'Certainly,' I said, and closed the doors and windows, though the air outside was balmy and the sun was shining. Mongouni was still feeling cold and said that he wanted to go upstairs for his overcoat. I thereupon offered mine. Wearing his hat and my overcoat, shivering with cold and trembling with emotion, this octogenarian started telling me about the sufferings of his people.

Mongouni distinctly remembered, and vividly described, the massacre of 1895 when some 200 000 Armenians were killed and 300 000 fled. In particular he described the massacre of 10,000 Armenians in a town called Palu which turned the Euphrates red. In 1901, Mongouni got out of Turkey after many difficulties and went to the USA. There he heard of other massacres to which his countrymen were subjected from time to time. The most devastating of all was in 1915, when a million Armenians were massacred and more than a million were forced to leave the

country. Subsequently, when Turkey invaded Kars and Ardahan and took them from Russia, she indulged in still another massacre of Armenians. 'What else can you do with lice?', said Enver Pasha once.

SOVIET ARMENIA

UNTIL I visited Armenia I had somehow connected it with the sea. I used to think that it was a low-lying land with a seafaring people. Perhaps I gained this impression from the Armenians in India, who were mostly traders and lived in the seaports of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. But I found Armenia very different from what I had imagined it to be. Its average elevation was about 4,000 feet above sea-level. It was a vast stony plateau surrounded by low hills, with Mt Ararat dominating them all. Occasionally there was a line of trees which looked like a moustache, a false moustache which had not grown but been stuck on. Armenia seemed a dumping-ground on which Providence, after fashioning beautiful Georgia, had flung all the superfluous stones and boulders. Yet, to quote Dorothy Wellesley's lines:

I am in love with her.
No appurtenances are hers;
No trappings are hers, only stone,
Fossil stone she has grown;
No flesh tint is here. The winds blow
Always from Asia, retrieved her flesh
Of ecstasy, long ago.

Armenia has every variety of stone, including marble. From time immemorial Armenians have been excellent stone-carvers, but their skill was used almost exclusively for building churches and palaces: the houses were mud hovels with thatched roofs. Now there is great constructional activity everywhere. All round Yerevan multistoried blocks of flats are rising.

The Red Square, in which our hotel was situated, was dominated by a statue of Lenin made by the famous sculptor Mercolev. Far more imposing was the statue of Stalin on a hillock close by. That statue rose 175 feet from the ground, and Stalin's own figure, standing on a massive pedestal, was 50 feet high. I was told that

in Stalin's time the statue used to be called Stalin Statue and the park around it used to be called Stalin Park. Now they are called Victory Statue and Victory Park.

Armenia, however, has no special reason to dislike Stalin, it escaped his purges. It struck me as one of the most contented Republics of the Soviet Union. Historically, Russia has been the protector of Armenian Christians against their Muslim rulers. In the Historical Museum at Yerevan, I was shown with pride the manifesto of Peter the Great in 1723 and of Catherine the Great in 1799 inviting Armenians from Turkey and Persia to come and settle down in Russia and offering them special privileges. An Armenian, Orni, was the first Russian Ambassador to Persia. In the eighteenth century Armenians flocked to Russia in large numbers and the trade of Persia with India on the one hand and with Russia on the other was mostly in their hands. In 1828, by the Treaty of Turmanchi, the area constituting the present Republic of Armenia was ceded to Russia by Persia, and from this time onward the Armenians looked up to Russia as their protector against the Turks.

If history has predisposed the people of Armenia in favour of Russia, the progress which they have been able to make during the last three decades has confirmed their loyalty to the Soviet Union. When Soviet power came to this region, said Mikoyan—its most famous son—Armenia was a land of orphans and tears. Now this tiny republic is keeping pace with her sister-states in the Soviet Union and is even forging ahead of them in some respects. Yerevan, which in 1922 was a middle sized village, has grown into a fine modern city. Then its population was 30,000, now it is over 400,000. Then only 15 per cent of the people were literate, now almost everyone can read and write. Then the only industries were a tannery, a few primitive copper mines worked by the British and the French, and a small cognac factory, now there are a hundred industrial enterprises in and around Yerevan. Agriculture, too, is making great progress. On the surface, no land is more unpromising for agriculture, and yet we had more delicious grapes and peaches and apricots in Armenia than in any other Republic. And Armenian cognac is the best in the Soviet Union.

The development of industry and agriculture in Armenia has been greatly facilitated by the construction of the Sevan-Zangi

multipurpose project. Lake Sevan is a beauty spot. Situated at a height of 6,250 feet above sea-level, it is the highest large lake in the USSR. It is as big as all the lakes in Switzerland combined. Twenty-eight streams flow into it, but only the river Zango flows out to join the river Aras on the Turko-Armenian frontier after a course of 65 miles and a drop of 3,300 feet. A cascade of eight hydro-electric stations, with a capacity of 35,000 kilowatts, is being built on the Zango river. The total output of electricity in Armenia before the Revolution was only 4,000 kilowatts and only the city of Yerevan was supplied with electricity. Now electricity is supplied to all the principal cities and to about 90 per cent of the villages.

The construction of these hydro-electric stations and the consequent drainage of Lake Sevan have marred its beauty. The water-level of the lake has fallen, and it is estimated that at the present rate of drainage the area of the lake will be reduced to less than half in fifty years. A number of villages have sprung up on what used to be the bēd of the lake. A former island has ceased to be an island; the water has receded from one side, and it is now connected with the land. We saw on this peninsula two picturesque monasteries, one dating from pre-Christian times and the other from the ninth century—melancholy witnesses of a time when religion, whether pagan or Christian, was a source of comfort to frail mortals.

I noticed that the economic development of Armenia was carried out entirely by the Armenians themselves. In this respect, Armenia was different from Central Asia. In Kirghistan, Kazakhstan and even in Uzbekistan, Russian experts could be seen in hundreds and there was a large Russian migration to these areas. In Armenia, on the contrary, the level of technical education is so advanced that it has not only a sufficient number of specialists for its own development but has been supplying them in appreciable numbers to other Republics. With their keen intelligence, capacity for hard work and aptitude for foreign languages, the Armenians have been playing an important role not merely in the field of industry but in science, administration, diplomacy, art and music. One need only recall the names of Mikoyan, next only to Khrushchev among the leaders of the Soviet Union; Mirgulyan, the brilliant 28-year-old mathematician and corresponding member of the All-Union Academy of Sciences;

Marshal Bagramian, one of the 65 Armenian generals thrown up by the Second World War, Khachaturian, one of the big three in the world of Soviet music, and Nalbandian, who has painted Anujee as well as Stalin

ANCIENT ARMENIA

I WAS as much interested in Armenia's storied past as in contemporary Armenia. In some other Republics of the Soviet Union, the present has overwhelmed the past. In Armenia, the past walks shoulder to shoulder with the present. I visited the town museum, the Industrial Exhibition and the art gallery of Yerevan, as well as the hydro-electric station at Sevan. I also visited such memorials of the past as the Historical Museum, the Museum of Ancient Manuscripts, the Monastery of Etchmiadzin and the ruined temple of Garni.

The Historical Museum gave a vivid picture of Armenian civilization from prehistoric times to the present day. After showing us the relics of the palaeolithic and neolithic ages the Director of the Museum showed us some stone barrels, each with a capacity for storing 1300 litres of wine, which he claimed to be at least three thousand years old. The coming of Christianity to Armenia was illustrated by a number of pictures and images. St Thaddeus and St Bartholomew were the first evangelists but they came into fierce conflict with the pagan religion, and it was not until the beginning of the fourth century that Christianity triumphed in Armenia. Even so, said the Director, Christianity came to Armenia 500 years before it reached Kiev and 700 years before Moscow was even known to exist.

In the Museum of Ancient Manuscripts, we were shown the first book printed in Armenia. It was dated 1512, decades earlier than any book was printed in Russia. Wherever we went the Armenians impressed on us the antiquity of their civilization. Their Museum of Ancient Manuscripts was indeed unique. It contained 9,759 manuscripts in various languages, mainly Greek, Persian, Latin, Aramaic and Old Armenian. Old Armenian was a syllabic language with about 3,000 characters. The modern Armenian alphabet, with 36 characters, was invented by a genius

called Mesrop Mashtots about A.D. 400. The manuscripts displayed in the museum are only about a twentieth of the stock in hand, and a magnificent building is being constructed to house the complete collection. The oldest manuscript on paper is dated A.D. 972. We were particularly charmed by the illuminated miniatures in Armenian manuscripts of the tenth century. There were books on history, philosophy, geography, astronomy and medicine, testifying to the degree of civilization in Armenia during medieval times.

One of our most interesting excursions from Yerevan was to the site of a ruined temple in a place called Garni. The massive temple stands surrounded by rugged mountains and is placed at the edge of a precipice, dropping several hundred feet to a river running through caverns measureless to man. The site is covered with broken columns and pillars, friezes and cornices, all beautifully engraved with geometrical designs. They had endless variety; it is typical of Armenian sculpture that the designs are never repeated. Occasionally a bird or a lion's head could be seen, but human figures were seldom depicted. Idols there must have been but they have been irretrievably lost. The temple was built in the third century B.C., destroyed by the Romans and rebuilt by an Armenian king in the first century A.D. That king assumed the title of Helios, thus anticipating *Le Roi Soleil* Louis XIV, and the inscription saying that he had the temple rebuilt in the eleventh year of his reign, i.e. in A.D. 77, can still be seen. The temple was finally destroyed by an earthquake in 1687 and has defied all attempts at reconstruction.

The temple of Garni was also a fort and a royal resort in summer. On one side we saw the ruined baths and the heating system, still more or less intact. The baths had a mosaic floor in which there was a picture of the sea with all its creatures, fishes, nymphs and mermaids. Remove the dust from their faces, and they look at you with centuries-old eyes. In one corner of the picture there is a forlorn fisherman, and below him an inscription echoing the cry of unsuccessful fishermen throughout the ages: 'I worked hard but caught nothing.'

On another day, we drove to the ancient monastery of Etchmiadzin, some 40 kilometres from Yerevan. It was a dusty drive over an uneven road, with vineyards and orchards on both sides, and poplars giving the countryside a Kashmir touch. On

entering Etchmiadzin we saw the theological seminary where Mikoyan used to be a student. Stalin, too, it may be recalled, was a student of theology and his mother's greatest ambition was that he should become a priest. At Etchmiadzin we visited an ancient church first built in mud in A.D. 301 and rebuilt in stone in the sixth century. Ever since the Armenian Church refused to accept the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon regarding the nature of Christ it has retained its separate identity, and the efforts of successive Popes to force the Church into reunion have been in vain. We met the Patriarch of the Church who, I was told, was a distinguished scholar. We heard that Armenian representatives from all parts of the world were assembling in Yerevan to celebrate his 50th birthday.

The monastery at Etchmiadzin contained a number of pictures and icons. The museum attached to it was even more interesting. It had dozens of crosses in gold, silver and crystal, including one carried by the Crusaders, there were Bibles in silver and ivory cases and the gorgeous robes and tiaras of the Bishops. We saw the hand of an early patriarch of Armenia, enclosed in a gold case. We were shown a curtain embroidered with palms and elephants, presented by the Armenian community in India to the Church in 1799. We also admired a large silver tray on which the Shah of Persia presented the fruits of his land to one of the Patriarchs, and a magnificent robe given by Catherine the Great to another. The most interesting object in the museum was the dagger which one of the Roman soldiers plunged into the body of Christ soon after the crucifixion in order to see whether he was really dead. This dagger was brought to Yerevan by St Thaddeus whose hand, too, we saw embalmed in a silver case.

Among the pictures in the museum, there are two I like to remember. One is Armenia, robed as a woman, sitting amidst the stones and boulders of her native land and weeping over its repeated destruction. Another is a picture of Noah's Ark descending on Mt Ararat. Ararat is as sacred to the Armenians as Kailas to the Hindus, Fujiyama to the Japanese and Bogdo Ola to the Mongols. For centuries Ararat had been in Armenian territory, and it still appears on the national emblem of the Republic of Armenia side by side with the star, the sickle and the scythe. To the Armenians, Mt Ararat is always Father Ararat. 'Our Father,' they pray, 'is in prison. May he be free!'

SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

FLIGHT TO TASHKENT

THE more man achieves progress, the more he makes himself miserable. Such was my thought at the end of our eleven-hour air journey from Moscow to Tashkent in the height of summer in 1953.

I was born in a horse-cart age in a bullock-cart town and cannot reconcile myself to air travel. I still hug the memories of my earliest outings with my parents in a jutka, drawn by two sleek white bulls. Subsequently my father sold the bulls and bought a horse. We thus rose a step higher in the social ladder of Kottayam, for we became one of the few families which owned horses instead of bullocks, but I wept bitterly at the departure of the bulls which had become as much a part of our household as Tiger, our dog, or Paru, our cow.

Sometimes journeys by land would be variegated by journeys by boat. Not by steam boats, but by little country boats, rowed or punted by hardy boatmen who would sing to the rhythm of their oars. Even now, after fifty years, the sights and sounds and smells of those journeys come back to me: the sight of lovely lagoons, luxuriant vegetation and tall coconut trees, bent by the wind into the most weird shapes; the sound of lake water lapping 'with low sounds by the shore', or the angry sounds of the sea into which the lagoons merge; and the smell of green paddy fields and fresh toddy and fried fish—fish which we ourselves caught in the backwaters, cooked on the sand and ate in the boat. On such journeys man had a feeling of oneness with earth and plant and animal.

I had a similar feeling of oneness with nature when I rode and walked over the most formidable mountain trail in the world from India to China in 1944. Then every meadow, grove and stream had the glory and the freshness of a dream. Subsequently I started doing all my journeys by air. Many times have I flown from India to England and from England to the USA.

I have also flown from the USA to Japan, Korea and China and, many times, between India and China, over the Hump, 20,000 feet high. Every time I did so I felt like a postal packet, carried from one place to another by the winds of circumstance. None of these air journeys, covering many thousand miles, was half so satisfactory as that journey by boat which I performed as a child of eight from Kottayam to Trivandrum, a journey of less than a hundred miles which we took three days and nights to complete.

The journey to Tashkent was not satisfying. We left Moscow at 8.30 in the morning and flew over a vast stretch of land for five hours to Aktubinsk in Kazakhstan. Aktubinsk looked like a small green patch, dropped by some kind providence in the middle of a dreary desert. In 1916 it had been the scene of an abortive rising against the Tsar. We left Aktubinsk at 2.30 and flew for another five hours over land which we could not see at all, because of the eternal dust haze of the desert, and reached Tashkent at 7.15 Moscow time, or 10.15 local time.

We had seen nothing en route and were suffering from splitting headaches, although our kind Russian hosts had spared no trouble to make our journey comfortable. A Russian air journey has certain special features. There are no safety belts. The Russians boast that, unlike American planes, they do not need safety belts, as they never have an accident. Nor until recently did they have hostesses. Now they have provided hostesses, but these women, plainly dressed, as most Russian women are, set about their business in a grim, businesslike fashion and disdain that bedside manner affected by the hostesses of other airlines such as Air India International. The food provided on Russian planes too is plain, wholesome and uninviting. Our Russian companions made up for it by bringing with them large quantities of fried chicken and different kinds of succulent sandwiches. They even provided two beds on the plane. Not even these kind attentions could prevent that headache—and that heartache—which one always experiences in being flown, like a postal packet, over land, without a chance of getting to like it, to know it, or often even to see it. Within a few minutes after reaching our destination we felt refreshed and invigorated, for we were now on the lap of mother earth, and the cordial reception which we had at the airfield as well as the vodka which we imbibed warmed our hearts and souls.

UZBEKISTAN

ON our arrival in Tashkent after a hot and tiresome air journey, the city struck me like a dishevelled district town in North-West India in summer. There were the same discomforts, dust and flies; and there was the same mass of loosely-clad, listless humanity, strolling hither and thither to get a breath of cool air. Next morning we were in a better mood to appreciate the beauty of Tashkent. It is essentially a garden city, full of parks and flower-gardens; and more and more trees are being planted everywhere. Indeed, some of the avenues were so thick and the overhanging branches of the trees so closely interlaced that they blotted out the sun; beneath them there was perpetual twilight. Tashkent has even a lake or two, artificial lakes, on which we spent a delightful evening in a motor boat and could, but for my spinal trouble, have spent an even more delightful time rowing. Evidently water is no problem in Tashkent.

Yet for centuries water used to be an acute problem in Tashkent and, indeed, in all Central Asia. In these regions water is known as 'the elixir of life'. There is a local proverb: 'Where there is water, there are gardens; where there is no water, there is a graveyard.' In Tashkent we saw an opera, *Farhad and Shirin*, of which the theme was the immemorial quest for water in Central Asia. The story can be briefly told. Farhad falls deeply in love with a beautiful girl, Shirin, who returns his love. But she cannot bring herself to marry him and be happy so long as people around her are suffering and the fields remain untilled for want of water. Farhad therefore tries desperately to dam the Syr Darya river and divert its waters to the hungry steppe; and he perishes heroically in this attempt.

The Soviet Government have been paying great attention to the problems of irrigation in Central Asia. Many canals have been built, and more are projected. The resources of the Syr Darya, the largest river in Central Asia, which flows through Kirghistan, Uzbekistan and Turkistan, are being fully utilized. Cotton is the principal crop. Wheat, barley, rice, maize, sugarcane and sweet potatoes are also grown. Uzbekistan is noted for its fruit, which includes eighty-six varieties of pomegranate, fifty kinds of fig and seventy-three kinds of grapes.

In Tashkent, as in most of the towns in the Soviet Union, there is a Revolution Square dominated by a statue of Stalin. There is also a Red Square, dominated by a statue of Lenin. From these Squares branch off the main roads, on both sides of which the construction or reconstruction of buildings is proceeding apace. An attempt is being made to fit these buildings into their surroundings and to use indigenous architectural traditions. In this respect the present policy is different from that followed in the early Revolutionary days. Then it was thought that all proletarian buildings should be built more or less according to the same pattern, regardless of their geographical location and historical background. This theory has now been discredited as 'formalistic and cosmopolitan'. The principle now followed is that the architecture should be 'nationalistic in form and socialistic in content'. Skilful use is being made of old architectural designs. In former times, Central Asia excelled in the use of arches. There were various regional styles, such as those of Bokhara, Samarkand and Ferghana, and in the beautiful opera house in Tashkent one room is set apart for each of these styles of interior decoration. The ceiling of the main hall has been brilliantly executed after the pattern of the embroidered cap which Turkis wear.

At Tashkent our party was hospitably looked after by the local authorities, including Zulfia, the poetess. They had framed a most strenuous programme for us, which Indira Gandhi, frail as she was, bravely fulfilled. Among the institutions which we visited in Tashkent were the Museum of Uzbek Culture and Art, the Medical Institute, the Conservatory of Music, the Palace of Pioneers, a collective farm, the Museum of Manuscripts and a Stalin textile combine.

The Revolution has brought great benefits to this region. Of these, none is more remarkable than education. The Director of Education told us that before the Revolution only 15 per cent of the people were literate. Now illiteracy has been almost wiped out at any rate in the towns. In addition to ordinary schools, there were polytechnical schools, a medical college and 11 music schools. We visited the Conservatory where the boys and girls treated us to a delightful concert of music old and new, Uzbek and Russian, vocal and instrumental. They even gave us an orchestral rendering of a Bengali tune which they had learnt from

Sheela Dayal, the wife of a former Counsellor of the Indian Embassy in Moscow.

It is interesting to compare the state of education as it was in British India with what it was in Tsarist, and is in Soviet, Russia. Though the percentage of literacy in British India was low enough in all conscience, British India was once held up as a model for Russia to follow in Central Asia. Arminius Vambery, who visited Central Asia in 1866, wrote:

In India, there are 65,000 institutions, including schools and colleges of all sorts, and the number of students amounts to nearly two million, out of which 72,000 are girls at schools maintained for them specially.

This number of school-attending children is certainly not very large, for it shows only nine scholars to a thousand of the population; but where do we find, in the Mohammedan world, a similar average percentage, and what is the number of Bashkir, Kazak, Tartar and Tschuvashian students, supported by Russia, when compared with the above percentage?

Thus, in 1866, Uzbekistan lagged behind British India. But by 1947, the position had changed. At the end of British rule in India, 87 per cent of the people of India were still illiterate, whereas illiteracy has, under Soviet rule, been practically eliminated. There cannot be a more eloquent commentary on the benefits which the Revolution of 1917 has brought to the people of Central Asia.

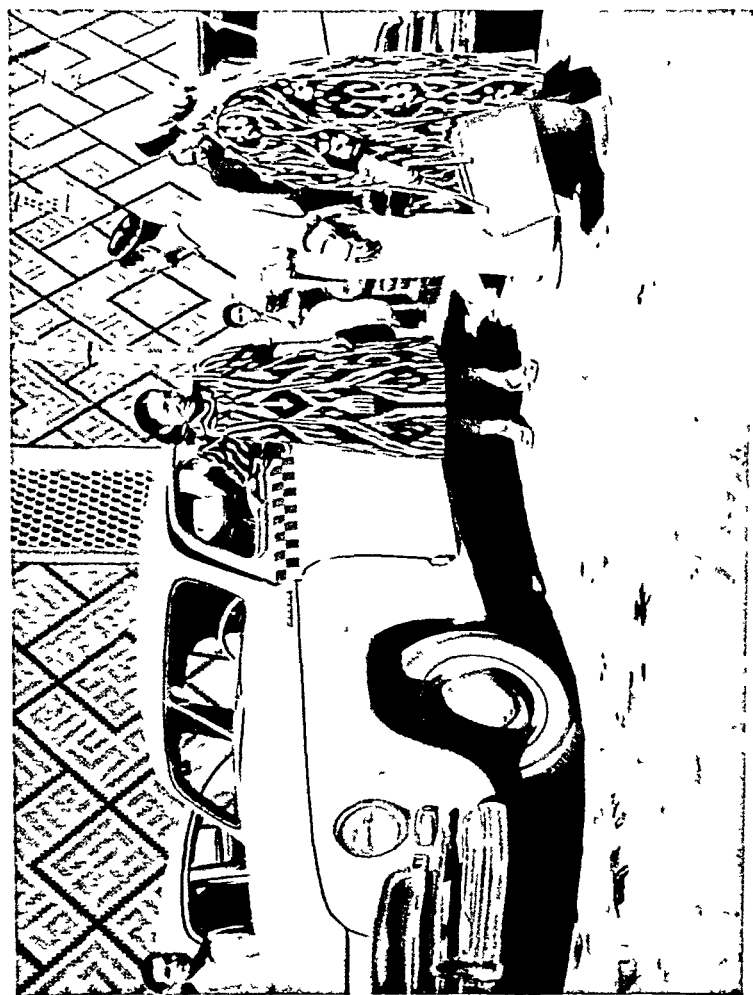
There are many critics who, while admitting the material progress made in Soviet Central Asia, aver that it was achieved at the cost of religion. Here we must draw a distinction between religion and culture. In Uzbekistan, as in other parts of the Soviet Union, religion is at a discount. Indira and Anujee visited a mosque in Tashkent and met the mufti in charge of it. From their description of him, it seemed that he too was a show-piece, a venerable antique, kept for the admiration of foreigners. He was 96 years old, had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca four times—he was 88 when he did this last—and had an old-world courtesy and dignity about him. He mentioned, more or less mechanically, that there was complete freedom of religion in Uzbekistan. Kaul tried to draw him out by putting

him a question in a roundabout way. 'In India,' he said, 'the older generation firmly believed in religion. But people of my generation do not care much for it. Can you tell me if that is the case here too?' The mufti evaded the question by replying that he hoped that Kaul would take a little more interest in religion and promptly asked the party to a delicious pulao dinner, laid out on a white sheet under a shady tree.

While religion is not encouraged in Central Asia, culture certainly is. The people are encouraged to study their old art and civilization. We visited the art gallery which exhibited the whole panorama of Uzbek culture, beginning with cave drawings and ending with Stalin in various benevolent poses. In between are the gracious paintings of the early Christian era, transfused, like the Indian paintings of that period, with Greek influences which came in with Alexander the Great and, later, specimens of the virile Muslim art, particularly under the Timurid dynasty in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The greatest and best-loved figure in Uzbek literature is the poet Alisher Navai, who lived in the fourteenth century. I am told that his poems are of exquisite beauty. His life too was a thing of beauty, judging from a fine film which we saw. It seemed to me that there was something in common between Alisher Navai and Confucius. Both had been invited by the decadent rulers of that period to help them as advisers, and both tried to reform them and even succeeded in doing so for a time. Ultimately both left their incorrigible masters in disgust and despair. There was, however, a fundamental difference in the outlook of the two men. Confucius was essentially an authoritarian, more interested in order than in liberty. Alisher Navai had, for a man who lived in the Middle Ages, inklings of freedom. Confucius, in communist eyes, was but one of that long line of priests, prophets and kings who oppressed humanity. Alisher Navai was the precursor of freedom.

There has undoubtedly been something like a cultural renaissance in Uzbekistan during Soviet times. This culture, however, is nurtured under the direct supervision of its foster mother, the Communist Party. Any erratic tendencies on its part such as 'bourgeois nationalism' are severely repressed, nor is anyone permitted to look back wistfully on the past and idealize it. History is but a foothold for the heroic Soviet man to stand on and build





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a new world; and if history proves inconvenient, it must be rewritten.

Recently *Izvestia*, the Government newspaper, severely criticized the scholars of the Uzbek Institute of History and Archaeology who, after prolonged labours, wrote *A History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan*. *Izvestia* pointed out 'substantial defects' in that book:

Under-estimation of the progressive significance of the annexation of Uzbekistan to Russia; elucidation of a number of events from a bourgeois-objectivist standpoint; concealment of the class struggle; glossing over the reactionary essence of Islam; excessive timidity in the exposure of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism; a certain idealization of feudal practices; attempts to represent feudal-nationalist risings as the manifestation of a revolutionary, popular liberation movement—risings which were stirred up by the Moslem priesthood and agents of the imperialist countries; such is an incomplete list of the errors committed by the authors and editors of the published volumes of the *History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan*.

This passage is significant. It shows the tendency in the Soviet Union to glorify not merely communism but Russia, even Tsarist Russia. In the early Revolutionary days, the Tsars, like other kings and emperors, were regarded as tyrants who oppressed the people. That was the keynote of the manifesto which was issued on 5 December 1917, under the names of Lenin and Stalin, 'To all the toiling and dispossessed Mohammedans in Russia and in the East'. 'Mohammedans of Russia,' ran the manifesto, 'Tartars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirghiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks and Tartars of Transcaucasia, Chechens and Gortsi of the Caucasus, all those whose mosques and prayer-houses were destroyed and whose religion and customs were trampled upon by the Russian Tsars and tyrants! Henceforth, your faith and customs, your national and cultural institutions, are proclaimed free and inviolable. Build up your national life freely and unhindered.' Stalin himself, at a meeting of the Tashkent collective farms in 1935, denounced the policy of the Tsars as 'a bestial and wolfish policy'. During the last war, however, the spirit of patriotism dominated even communism.

Emperors like Peter the Great and generals like Kutuzov and Suvorov began to be glorified. The Russian advance in Central Asia, which had been previously regarded as the imposition of a despotic rule on alien nationalities, began to be regarded as a beneficent process in history, and those who had risen against the rule of the Tsars ceased to be patriots and became the reactionary agents of British and Turkish imperialism. Hence the criticism of *Izvestia* that Uzbek scholars had underestimated 'the progressive significance of the annexation of Uzbekistan to Russia.'

Culture thus flourishes in Soviet Central Asia, culture which is as closely assimilated to communism as the lunar halo to the moon.

THE GLORY OF SAMARKAND

ONE day we took the golden road to Samarkand by air. We left Tashkent at 9.30 and reached Samarkand exactly an hour and ten minutes later. Here Indira and Anujee, with their sarees, attracted considerable attention. Anujee could be easily placed as an Indian, but not Indira. Where, the Uzbeks wondered, had Indira come from? For, despite her saree, she was so fair, had short hair and chiselled features. She might come from any part of the world and yet could belong to none. Indira is the kind of person whose beauty is at once individual and universal. She herself is charmingly unconscious of her charm. Once I was astonished to hear her say casually that she would probably bequeath her body to some hospital so that they might cut it up or make any use of it they liked. Thanks to recent medical discoveries, she said, a dead person's eyes could be used to enable a living man to see—or to see better.

In Samarkand, as in Tashkent, we were accommodated in a delightful country house. The rooms were oriental in their decorations, there were carpets everywhere, on the walls as well as on the floors. Oriental too, was the sanitation here. All around was a garden merging into a park, with fruit trees, flowering shrubs and a variety of roses.

There are few cities in the world which have such a halo of romance as Samarkand. It was here that the Thousand and One Tales of the Arabian Nights were related by Scheherazade.

to Sultan Shahriyar. Unfortunately it attracted the baleful attention of three of the mightiest conquerors the world has seen: Alexander the Great, Genghiz Khan and Timur. In 329 B.C. Alexander the Great captured Samarkand. Here and in the neighbourhood he encountered far greater resistance than elsewhere in the course of his triumphal march. Having overcome this resistance, Alexander built a series of fortresses, each called 'Alexandria', from Samarkand to Khodzhent, now named Leninabad. In the next few centuries, Samarkand passed under the rule of one dynasty after another. Among those who established their domination here were the Yueh-chi, the Huns, the Indo-Bactrians and the Indo-Parthians. In the first few centuries of the Christian era, particularly under the Kushans, the connexion between Samarkand and India was intimate; there developed in Samarkand a school of sculpture, analogous to the Gandhara or Graeco-Buddhist sculpture of North-West India. At that time the connexion between Samarkand and China was also close. The famous Silk Road passed through Samarkand and Bokhara to the cities of the Roman empire. Thus Samarkand was a meeting-place of the three greatest civilizations the world has known, Indian, Chinese and Graeco-Roman.

No trace of the architecture of that period remains today. All was destroyed by Genghiz Khan who took the city in A.D. 1221 and left it to his soldiers to loot for three days and nights. They did their work so thoroughly that its population was reduced to a third of what it had been. The past of Samarkand was blotted out; and the only things that remain today are the mounds on which a great city once flourished and on which even grass now seems reluctant to grow.

There are, however, a number of monuments which belong to the period of Timur and his successors. To a student of Indian history Timur is no stranger. He was a fierce tornado which swept over northern India for a few weeks and then swept back again to Central Asia, leaving ruin and desolation behind. Nothing could be more terribly laconic than the entry which Timur made in his diary regarding the conquest of India. 'I then turned my attention to Hindustan. My general told me that conquest would be difficult, but I thought that it would be easy. Did so. Did so.' Those two words signified massacre, pestilence and famine.

On his return to Samarkand from India, Timur built a magnificent mosque in commemoration of his victory. We spent an hour in its half ruined premises and conjured up the vision of what it must have been in Timur's time. With a main hall, 83 by 63 metres, supported by 400 pillars, a gateway 36½ metres high, on which were engraved geometrical figures and quotations from the Koran, and a noble dome, predominantly blue but with touches of green and yellow, this must have been one of the tallest and most imposing monuments in the East. Unfortunately, it has been damaged by repeated earthquakes and is now beyond the power of even Soviet architects to repair.

Known to history as a ruthless conqueror, Timur was a man of taste and, according to his lights, of faith. One of the most interesting buildings constructed by him was the Shah-i-Zinda, or the Living King, built in honour of a Muslim saint, Kusan Ibn i-Abbas, who lived in the seventh century and was a cousin of the Prophet Mohammad. He was murdered by his enemies, but Timur recognized his holiness and built for him a tomb covered with Koranic quotations. In its neighbourhood, Timur buried his own relatives, including two of his wives, for whom he built two mausoleums. Here Timur also built a mosque which came to be considered almost as sacred as Mecca itself. And all around there is a vast graveyard where pious Muslims think it an honour to be buried.

Timur's own tomb is one of the finest architectural monuments in Central Asia. It was begun by him for his favourite grandson, Mohammad Sultan. In 1403, when Timur was conducting a campaign in Trans-Caucasia, he summoned his grandson. He died on reaching Trans-Caucasia and Timur, stricken with grief, returned to the capital in 1404 and began the construction of a tomb for his grandson. The next year Timur himself died, and the monument which was intended for his grandson now contains also the relics of Timur, of his spiritual preceptor, and of his famous grandson, Uluq Beg.

Standing before Timur's tomb, I thought of my visit to the grave of another great purveyor of death, Genghiz Khan. I could not help contrasting the veneration in which the Mongols held the remains of Genghiz Khan with the nonchalant attitude of the Uzbeks towards Timur. For these people the tomb of Timur is but a beautiful architectural monument, for the Mongols

the grave of Genghiz Khan is the abode of an immortal. Indeed the Mongols have believed for centuries that one day Genghiz Khan will rise from the grave and establish a universal empire. In December 1944 I visited his tomb, guarded by Mongol Lamas and Chinese soldiers, in a lovely spot near Lanchow, on the Yellow River; and the Secretary-General of the YMCA and myself stood before his tomb, reverently bowed and burnt incense. We did not observe any such ceremonies towards Timur, nor was it expected of us. Our learned guide, a professor of history in the Samarkand University, a dapper little man wearing an embroidered shirt and an embroidered cap, jauntily led the way to Timur's tomb without taking off his shoes; and we saw no reason why, if he did not take off his shoes, we should. When my wife showed some signs of fatigue, he casually suggested that she might sit on Timur's grave and listen to his anecdotes. She of course refused to do so, for to sit on anyone's tomb is regarded as sacrilege by an Indian. The Russians too seem to have treated Timur's tomb with scant reverence. In 1941 they had his tomb as well as the tombs of his wives, sons and grandson opened, examined and closed up again. They then discovered that the little finger of one of Timur's most beautiful wives was missing. Was it an act of robbery, our distinguished guide wondered, or a tribute to dead beauty, for the lady was noted for her dainty fingers? If Timur had foreseen that his, and his relations', tombs would be thus desecrated, he might, like another of history's great tyrants, Chin Shih Huang-ti, Emperor of China in the first century B.C. and builder of the Great Wall, have provided his tomb with cross-bows and arrows which would go off as soon as any impious hands dared to desecrate it.

Not far from Timur's grave lies that of his grandson, the greatest ruler of his dynasty, Uluq Beg. Uluq Beg, like our own Akbar, was one of those rulers who were born ahead of their time. His entire life was spent in thwarting the forces of reaction, both in the civil and in the ecclesiastical sphere. He was not merely a great ruler, but a great scholar, scientist, mathematician and astronomer. By far the most interesting object which we saw in Samarkand was an observatory constructed by Uluq Beg in the first part of the fifteenth century. This observatory, like its builder, had a strange fate. In 1449 Uluq Beg was murdered by his own son, who became the focus of obscurantist elements in

the country. They did not spare even his observatory. It was destroyed so thoroughly that for 450 years even the fact that such an observatory had existed was forgotten. It was discovered by chance by a Russian archaeologist, Viatkin, in 1909, and the clues to its construction and the calculations on which they were based were found in a book written by Jai Singh, Maharaja of Jaipur who, in the seventeenth century, built a fine observatory, Jantar Mantar, which still exists in a perfect state of preservation in Delhi. How accurate Uluq Beg's calculations were may be seen from the fact that he reckoned a solar year to be 365 days, 6 hours, 10 minutes and 8 seconds, whereas subsequent calculations have established its duration to be 365 days, 6 hours, 9 minutes and 10 seconds. Thus Uluq Beg's calculations fell short of the mark by less than a minute.

It is indeed sad that so great a scholar and ruler as Uluq Beg should have been killed by a fanatic. We Indians cannot afford to throw stones at the Uzbeks for this crime, for the greatest man whom India had produced since Buddha met the same fate in 1948. Bernard Shaw was right when he exclaimed on the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, 'How dangerous it is to be good!'

FLIGHT 'TO FRUNZE

FOUR years after our first trip to Central Asia, we flew again from Moscow to Tashkent and thence to Frunze. My first visit to Tashkent, in an ordinary plane, took 11½ hours, my last, in a jet plane, took 3½. The jet has now become the normal means of communication between Moscow, Prague, Peking, Siberia and Central Asia. Even to India there has been an experimental flight which covered the distance between Moscow and Delhi in 8 hours. It could have been done in even less time if Pakistan had not refused permission to overfly its territory and forced the plane to take a more circuitous route via Sinkiang and Tibet to Delhi.

The Soviet Union may be ahead of the rest of the world in such matters as the use of the jet plane and the invention of the intercontinental ballistic missile but it is still woefully lacking in consumer goods. Even in this respect there has been a per-

ceptible improvement during the last few years. No longer is it necessary for a traveller to carry toilet paper with him in his pocket; this is now provided in planes, hotels and restaurants. Nor is it necessary to take a flask of water, as my predecessor always had to; not only water, but meals are provided—cold meals on internal journeys and hot on international journeys. There are hostesses too, not as well trained to captivate as on Western air lines, but equally kindly, friendly and, in their own way, efficient.

At one time the whole of Central Asia used to be out of bounds for foreigners. Soon after Stalin's death, Tashkent was thrown open but the rest of Uzbekistan remains closed. Anujee and I, however, were given special permission to visit Chirchik, an industrial town an hour's drive from Tashkent. There we saw the Chirchik river, flowing out of the hills for 200 kilometres to join the Syr Darya. On the Chirchik a dam and a number of hydro-electric stations have been constructed. We saw those in the morning; and in the evening we saw the Water Power Laboratory, where experiments are being made to harness the rivers of Central Asia, with their vagaries, to the service of man and to make them irrigate millions of acres and provide electricity.

In Tashkent the harvest of cotton was in full swing. This is the most festive part of the year in Uzbekistan, for its prosperity depends mostly on cotton. Not only farmers but almost the entire population took part—and pride—in the harvesting operations. On the day of our arrival, there was to have been a football match between Tashkent and Samarkand. When we got to the football field we were told that the Samarkand team could not come because they had gone off to pick cotton. Tamara Khanum, the famous Uzbek dancer, told us in Moscow that she was going to Tashkent to take part in the harvest festival. The Tashkent University was almost empty because the students had been directed to pick cotton.

A two-hour flight from Tashkent brought us to Frunze. While approaching Frunze, I could hardly conceal my joy at seeing my old friends, the Heavenly Mountains, along whose side I had travelled by road for a thousand miles from Kashgar to Urumchi 13 years ago. And soon I would be crossing them from Soviet Central Asia to Chinese Central Asia, from Kazakhstan to Sinkiang, from Alma Ata to Urumchi.

KIRGHISTAN

OF all the places in the Soviet Union in which I had stayed during five years, the dacha on the outskirts of Frunze, the capital of Kirghistan, was perhaps the loveliest. It was situated at a height of about 2,500 feet and commanded a fine view of the Heavenly Mountains (Tien Shan). In front were vineyards and orchards. Behind was a gurgling stream, rippling over pebbles and perpetually chattering. All around were poplar trees, graceful sentinels, keeping watch over us as vigilantly as the Kirghiz sentries prowling in the garden. To the north and east were high hills, with a gap between them just wide enough to reveal the glittering peaks of the Tien Shan.

It was in such places that our sages of yore used to meditate on the mysteries of life and death, and even this remote spot in Central Asia attracted their attention. Not far from Frunze, in the village of Ak-beshum, two Buddhist temples of the seventh or eighth century are being excavated. We would have liked to see them but were told that the road was bad and a bridge had been washed away by recent floods. A member of the Academy of Sciences described to us the structure of the temples. They seem to have been similar to those which were excavated by Aurel Stein on the eastern side of the Tien Shan and which I myself saw in Sinkiang thirteen years ago. In Issiq Ata, a sanatorium to which we went, we saw a figure of Buddha carved on a huge block of granite. This is said to belong to the third century. On either side of it is a sacred inscription in Devanagiri characters, unfortunately overlaid by the signatures of paltry men who, in their thirst for ephemeral immortality, have scrawled their names across it.

Frunze is one of the newest cities in the Soviet Union. A century ago there was nothing here but a village called Pishpek, but after the Revolution it was named in honour of the great revolutionary general who was born here in 1885. Pishpek, which in Kirghiz means 'peace and quiet', is however a more appropriate name for this secluded spot than the harsh appellation, *Frunze*.

The Kirghiz Republic is perhaps the most outstanding example of what Soviet rule has done for primitive peoples. A feudal, or

pre-feudal, society is being converted into a modern state; a pastoral tribe into a socialist nation. At the same time its typical features have been preserved. The upper valleys, covered with rich Alpine vegetation, are still the abode of shepherds, rearing sheep and goats, of which we saw some superb specimens feeding on the hillside. The great Chu Valley Project has brought thousands of acres under cultivation. Sugarcane is grown so extensively in the Chu Valley that it is commonly called 'the Sugar Valley'. Tobacco and cotton are also grown. Industry has kept pace with agriculture, but not outstripped it as it has done elsewhere in the Soviet Union. We visited a factory for the production of agricultural machinery. Among the minerals which are being exploited are coal, mercury, lead, sulphur, arsenic and even uranium.

In the field of education the progress of the last two decades has been even more remarkable. Before the Revolution barely 1 per cent of the population could read and write. There were a few mullah schools, where some kind of instruction used to be imparted in Arabic; and literacy among women was unknown. Now there are schools by the hundred, dozens of technical institutes and even a university. By 1952 the educational level had risen sufficiently to justify the establishment of an Academy of Sciences, the youngest in the Soviet Union. There are also a number of theatres. We saw a ballet called *Anar*, based on a local legend. The part of the heroine, Anar, was performed by a gifted Kirghiz girl who received her training in Leningrad.

The Kirghiz people came under the sway of Russia in 1876. Tsarist rule, however, did little to improve their standard of living. Kirghizia continued to be under the Khan of Kokand, who was forced to acknowledge Russian hegemony. The Emirs of Central Asia—of Kokand, Khiva and Bokhara—remained loyal vassals of the Tsar, somewhat like the Maharajas of India under British rule. But whereas the British ensured certain minimum standards of administration in the Princely States and stepped in when misrule reached scandalous dimensions, the Tsar left the people of Central Asia entirely to the mercy of the Khans, who waxed rich at the expense of their people. The Emir of Bokhara, for instance, had a fortune in bullion and gems amounting to £64 million at the time of his flight after the Revolution. The rule of the Emir of Kokand was no better; during the 20 years

before the Revolution, the population of Kirghizia is estimated to have declined by 10 per cent and their cattle by 20 per cent. What was worse, every attempt was made to prevent tribal solidarity from growing into national consciousness, and the administrative boundaries were so drawn as to disintegrate the races of Central Asia.

Very different was the policy of Russia after the Revolution. The state boundaries were redrawn so as to make them conform to racial distribution. Kirghizia, which was at first a part of the Turkmenistan Autonomous Region, was formed into a separate Republic in 1936, and the people were taught to take a pride in their own culture and traditions, subject of course to the overriding control of the Communist Party. The architect of this policy was Stalin. Himself a Georgian who, as a student, first caught the public eye, and incurred the wrath of the Russian authorities, by objecting to the system of imparting education in Georgia in the Russian language, he understood the strength of national traditions and moulded his policy accordingly. When, however, the growth of nationalism threatened the iron unity of the Soviet Union, Stalin denounced it as 'bourgeois nationalism' and pounced on the offenders as wrathfully as any Tsar had ever done. Among the 'bourgeois nationalists' who were purged in the terrible thirties were Yusuf Abdurrahmanov, once Prime Minister of Kirghizia, and Ryskalovich Ryskalov who had attained an all-Union status. In 1922 he was Stalin's own Deputy, when he was Peoples' Commissar of Nationalities, and later he was Vice-President of the RSFSR. This did not prevent him from disappearing in the great purge of 1937. Kirghizia, however, remained singularly unaffected by the political vicissitudes in the later years of Stalin's life and thereafter. There has been a certain continuity, of which Sukerlov, who has been the Prime Minister for the last 13 years, is an example. Still in his early forties, he struck me as a remarkably able man.

In Frunze there is one Dr Tanekev who has named his daughter Indira, after Indira Gandhi, our Prime Minister's daughter. I expressed a desire to meet little Indira in order to give her a doll which Indira Gandhi had sent for her. Unexpectedly, we were invited to their flat and treated to a sumptuous Kirghiz meal. Dr Tanekev also told us something of his life history. His parents had been so poor that it was not until after the Revolution that

he tasted meat. Their home was only a few miles away from the capital but they could not afford to visit Frunze. Thanks to the Revolution he had been able to receive education, and now he was a doctor. His wife too, a charming cross between a Kirghiz and a Tartar, was a doctor. They were well off by Soviet standards; this year they had even bought a Moscovitch car.

We left the Tanekevs with visions of a quick bath and an early bed, but were told that the Mayor's farewell banquet in our honour was ready and the guests had already assembled. When we expressed our surprise at the prospect of another dinner, our host expressed equal surprise that we should have thought that we could get away without a farewell banquet on the last evening of our stay in Kirghizia. Meekly and outwardly cheerfully we went to that banquet, which consisted of a dozen courses apart from *zakuski* which formed a dinner in themselves, and was punctuated by toasts. Alfred Gonsalves made up for our deficiency in drinking by nobly quaffing glass after glass of Kirghiz wine, Kirghiz champagne and Kirghiz liqueur. Suddenly he became pale and silent and reeled out of the room. The *pièce de résistance* was a roasted sheep's head which was brought and placed before me as the chief guest. It looked quite lifelike and seemed to implore us not to dismember it. Our host proceeded to chop off an ear and scoop out an eye and gave them to me, and he gave the other eye to Anujee and the other ear to Alfred. To our hosts, the sheep's head was a delicacy of delicacies; to us, to use Gandhiji's phrase, 'a poem of pity'.

KAZAKHSTAN

A FLIGHT of 45 minutes, up the mountains to 10,000 feet and down again to 2,000 feet, brought us to Alma Ata. Here too we were accommodated in a beautiful dacha, in a valley surrounded by hills. The view from this dacha was not so sublime as from our residence in Frunze but it was more intimate. With overhanging vines and apple trees laden with fruit, and lovers' lanes ramifying in all directions, this was a place for honeymoon couples rather than for philosophers. Here one thinks of the Garden of Eden rather than of the Kingdom of God.

To pass from Kirghistan to Kazakhstan is like passing from Afghanistan to India, from a high, land locked and picturesque mountain state into a vast, sprawling subcontinent, with an infinite variety of scenery. Fifteen Kirghistans can easily go into Kazakhstan. Some 2,000 miles from west to east and over 1,000 miles from north to south, it is situated deep in the heart of Eurasia and is equidistant from the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. It stretches from the Caspian Sea to the Altai Mountains and from Siberia to the Pamir range. It is the largest Republic in the USSR with the exception of Russia, and larger than all the other 14 Republics combined. Kunaev, the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, told me that Kazakhstan was larger than the combined area of Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

Kunaev also told me of the great efforts which were being made to develop this vast area. The first five Five Year Plans for Kazakhstan cost 53 billion roubles, the sixth alone is to cost 60 billion roubles. Kazakhstan is rich in minerals. Eighty-six per cent of the lead in the USSR and 40 per cent of the copper and tin are produced in Kazakhstan. Here they have the largest lead plant in Europe and the largest copper plant. Coal production, which centres round Karaganda, is the third largest in the USSR. Before the Revolution a British company had a concession in Karaganda. Since then the production of coal has risen 46 times. As for oil, Karaganda is noted for its quality rather than quantity. It was Kazakhstan petrol which Chkalov used on his pioneer flight across the North Pole to the USA. Electricity is being developed everywhere and Malenkov is in charge of a big hydro-electric project in Ust Kamenogorsk. The Prime Minister went on to say that Kazakhstan also had many other minerals—bauxite, gold and silver. Uranium too?, I asked. 'Yes,' said the Prime Minister with a wink, 'we could find uranium as well, if we wanted.' From the way he smiled and the fact that there is uranium in adjoining Kirghistan, I thought that uranium was also being exploited here.

The greatest exploit of Kazakhstan, however, has been the cultivation of virgin lands. It is here that Khrushchev's great experiment was tried, despite some of his colleagues' opposition, and found successful. The figures given to me were astounding. In 1953 the total cultivated area of Kazakhstan was 9.3 million hectares, by 1957, it had trebled to 27.8 million hectares.

Of the 33 million hectares of virgin lands which have been brought under cultivation in the USSR, 21 million lie in Kazakhstan. In 1956, the total output of grain in Kazakhstan was 1400 million poods, of which 1000 came from virgin lands alone. The credit for this tremendous achievement goes primarily to the people of Kazakhstan but they were assisted by a million settlers who came from all over the Soviet Union and even from neighbouring countries such as Bulgaria and Rumania. We were shown a film exalting the spirit of patriotism and adventure which had brought young men and women to work under the most difficult conditions in this desolate region for the glory of their motherland—and of communism.

That the cultivation of virgin lands involved a great deal of hardship cannot be doubted. Complaints from settlers appeared now and then in the newspapers, though the writers were trounced for their lack of public spirit. One of the settlers wrote that he wanted to get back to his village. 'After all,' he said, 'I am a volunteer and not a conscript.' Another wrote that he 'did not want to live like a savage among wolves'. A well-known writer, Nikolai Pogodin, wrote a play, *We Three went to the Virgin Lands*. In the play, three heroes set off for the virgin lands. One of them goes to escape punishment for hooliganism; another is a lonely girl, who lives in a dormitory and has no friends or relations; and the third is deserted by his girl friend and makes a split-second decision to volunteer for the virgin lands. *Pravda* took Pogodin to task for having failed to find anything heroic in the everyday life of his characters, and for depicting Soviet youth as shallow and feeble. Pogodin had to rewrite the play and expressed his regret for 'misplacing the accent in the play and showing the virgin lands as a no-man's land'.

Alma Ata became the capital of Kazakhstan only in 1929. Before the Revolution this pleasant spot was a cantonment for Russian soldiers and was known as Fort Verney. Since it became the capital, its population has grown from 28,000 to 370,000. Here, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, housing is a great problem and is being resolutely tackled. Many new townships, with all modern amenities, are being built. The Deputy Mayor of the city, an able Kazakh woman, told me how different the attitude of the authorities today was from that of the Tsars. In 1916 the citizens of Alma Ata had addressed a petition to the Duma,

explaining that the roads in Alma Ata were dirty and dark and the people could not walk about in the evening. The reply was that normal people should stay indoors after dusk!

There are a number of plants in Alma Ata producing various types of machines. Our hosts tried to tempt me to see them, but I said I would like to see some kind of plant which I had not seen before. So they took me to a champagne factory. Before the Revolution there was only one such factory in the USSR, producing 200 000 bottles of champagne. Now there were 16 factories producing 30 million bottles. The factory which we saw was now producing half a million bottles, by 1960, the output would rise to 1.5 million. We saw the various processes of manufacture, but I must confess that we spent more time tasting the various kinds of champagne—dry, with 3 per cent sugar, semi dry, with 5 per cent, semi sweet, with 8 per cent, and sweet, with 11 per cent sugar—and capping them with cognac 25 years old. When we got up and said good-bye, the Director of the champagne factory said '*Stiaak*' which in Kazakh means 'A glass for good luck'. Having drunk it we got up again, but our host said '*Kitiriak*' which means 'A glass for your journey'. Having drunk that as well, we thought we could now leave finally, but no he said, according to Kazakh custom we had to drink still another toast, '*Kileriak*', which means 'A glass for your return'. Our host was a perfect advertisement for champagne, for he was always soaked in it and seemed none the worse, indeed he was the better for it, for though he told us that he was sixty-five he looks no more than fifty.

Our most pleasant experience in Alma Ata was our encounter with a Mother Heroine. She has had 14 children and has named the youngest Indira, after our Prime Minister's daughter. She has richly earned the title of Mother Heroine, having exceeded the prescribed quota of ten children by four. There is a story in the Soviet Union that when the Order of Mother Heroine was conferred on a woman, and a number of speeches were made eulogizing her services to the state, she replied, accepting the compliments with becoming humility, and then pointed to a timid little individual in a corner and said 'There sits my helper'.

Indira's father is more than a simple helper of a Mother Heroine. He is a hero in his own right, having fought with distinction in



the First and Second World Wars. He has rows of medals and decorations and a superb moustache.

Hearing that we were in Alma Ata, this couple invited us to their home. The cities of the Soviet Union are terribly overcrowded and Alma Ata is no exception. The best that an average Soviet citizen can hope for is a three-roomed flat. Indira's parents, however, had an entire three-storied house to themselves. Evidently, a Mother Heroine has many privileges.

All the fourteen children joined their parents in entertaining us. One sang, another played; and little Indira seemed to feel instinctively that she was the centre of attraction. Bottles of wine and champagne were opened, and we were treated to a sumptuous dinner, consisting of Central Asian and Caucasian dishes, for our hosts originally came from the Caucasus. Pulao and kabab and the richest of pastries were served. Toasts were proposed and presents were exchanged. When we were about to leave their house, our host imprinted on my cheeks as well as on Anujee's a full-blooded kiss, in the true Russian style. This was the first time that I had been kissed by a man. It was also the first time that Anujee received the kiss of a stranger. She told me that the resolute impact of his bristly moustache gave her an uncanny sensation. I myself found comfort in the softer osculation of the Mother Heroine who, for all her 14 children, still looked young and attractive.

TADIKSTAN

TADIKSTAN was the last Central Asian Republic that I visited. I went there in the summer of 1960 in the exalted company of Dr Rajendra Prasad, President of India, and the not so exalted company of his entourage. When I saw the list of people accompanying the President to Moscow I had the temerity to suggest that it might be cut down, so as to make the visit less regal—or viceregal—and more businesslike. After all, Jawaharlal Nehru came to the Soviet Union in 1955 with only six companions, including his daughter Indira Gandhi who paid her own fare to Moscow. The other five were the Secretary-General of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Head of the European Division, a couple of stenographers and Nehru's faithful old valet, Hari, who,

while in Moscow, developed such a liking for caviare that Indira Gandhi has to share with him the occasional jars that I send her. The Russians have a habit of going about in swarms, but they appreciated the simplicity and austerity of Nehru's tours, and I felt that our President's homely dignity, too, would appeal to the people of the Soviet Union without the need to buttress it by a large retinue. But all my arguments were in vain. Major-General Harnarain Singh, Military Secretary to the President, who was brought up in the splendid old Anglo-Indian tradition, produced statistics to show how many more attendants other dignitaries, including Khrushchev and Voroshilov, had brought with them to India. He contended that the staff he had selected was the minimum with which he could manage, and I had no alternative but to acquiesce.

Tajikistan was the penultimate stage in our journeys with the President in the USSR. Apart from Moscow, we visited Lenin-grad, Kiev, Sochi and Tashkent. A journey of 6 hours from Moscow—it would have been 15 hours before the advent of the jetplane—took us to Stalinabad, capital of Tajikistan. Tajikistan is a frontier republic between the USSR, China and Afghanistan. There the Tien Shan and the Pamirs meet. While flying, we noticed that these ranges were still covered with snow. In the Tien Shan are the two highest peaks in the USSR, namely, Lenin Peak, 23,400 feet, and Stalin Peak, 24,600 feet high. The relative height of these peaks shows the relative esteem in which Lenin and Stalin were ostensibly held in Stalin's lifetime.

Soon after our arrival in Tajikistan we were driven into the country for a sumptuous banquet-cum-concert in honour of the President of India. That drive gave us an idea of the mountainous character of the Republic. We were told that 92 per cent of Tajikistan was covered with mountains and only 8 per cent was cultivable. Our road rose and fell through a cluster of confused hills, behind which stood the snowcapped mountains. I almost felt as if I was in wild Waziristan, at any moment a gang of outlaws might appear and waylay our car, riddle it with bullets and hold us to ransom! But, no! The pacification of its frontier regions by the Soviet Government has been more thorough than was the pacification of the North-West Frontier of India by the British Government.

Stalinabad is one of the many cities in the Soviet Union which have been named after Stalin. De-Stalinization has not extended to place-names. Stalin's most faithful comrade, however, has lost his title to geographical immortality. While flying to Stalinabad, we passed the former city of Molotov which, in 1958, resumed its historic name, Perm.

Stalinabad used to be called Diushambe, the Tajik word for Monday, because Monday used to be the market-day there. In the adjoining region of Sinkiang, I noticed during my travels in 1944 that a large number of towns were called after the day on which the market was held. Diushambe, we were told, used to be a small village, with only one street lamp lit by kerosene oil and fastened on a 6-foot pole in the market square. Now, like most cities in the Soviet Union, this place has wide streets, squares and parks. The two widest streets are called Lenin Prospect and Aini Prospect. The latter is called after a Tajik writer, Aini, who died in 1954, and in whose memory a mausoleum and a museum are to be erected. Stalinabad has also an artificial lake, called Komsomol lake, because it was built largely by the voluntary labour of Komsomol workers. There we saw the people of Stalinabad boating and bathing under a scorching sun and eating, drinking and making themselves merry in a restaurant which jutted into the lake.

My escort was a very able woman, who seemed to speak with authority about men and things. I took her to be a Minister and asked her if she was one. No, she said, she was secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. That, I said, was more important than a Minister, was it not? 'Of course,' she replied, looking mischievously at Benediktov, Soviet Ambassador to India, who had been a Minister for over twenty years, 'Ministers have to take orders from us.'

The progress made by women in Central Asia is truly remarkable. We met the Mayor of Samarkand, who was a woman; so was the chief architect. The President of Uzbekistan was a woman too. She held a sumptuous banquet in our President's honour and adopted him, according to custom, into the Uzbek tribe by dressing him up in a gold-embroidered velvet gown and Uzbek cap. She observed that before the Revolution, and for a decade or two after, many women used to wear veils—a fact which was confirmed by Benediktov, who was an agronomist in Samar-

kand from 1925 to 1930 Before the Revolution the number of literate women in the Emirate of Bokhara, of which present day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were parts, could be counted on the fingers of one hand Now, literacy is universal among women as well as men

In Samarkand, Dr Rajendra Prasad visited the fifteenth-century observatory of Uluq Beg, a prototype of our own Jantar Mantar I had been there three times and therefore stayed back at the entrance to the observatory where a huge crowd had collected I spoke to some of the children All of them knew Russian—which showed at what an early stage Russian was taught in the schools, at any rate in the cities I also spoke to an old woman with an unusual face She said she was not an Uzbek herself, but had been born a thousand miles away, west of the Urals Yet she had never revisited her home since 1923, because, she said, at the time of the Revolution, she was one of the few women who could read and write and count up to a hundred So 'our Lenin' asked her to go to Samarkand where there were no literate women at all, and in Samarkand she had stayed all these years as a teacher Now she was on the point of retiring on a pension of 850 roubles a month She said that she had three daughters and two sons, four of whom had passed out of various institutes and one was still at school I was struck by this woman's dedication to duty and to 'our Lenin'

The President of Tajikistan, on whom Dr Prasad made a formal call, gave him an account of the condition of the State before and after the Revolution His description of the time before the Revolution consisted of a series of negatives then there were no paved streets, no stone houses, no sanitation, no water supply (drinking water used to be sold by water-carriers), no schools other than a couple of mullah's schools which taught the Koran in Arabic, no doctors no newspapers, no scientists or technicians, no theatres and no industry Now, there were no less than 300 industrial plants in Tajikistan Sixty-five billion roubles had been invested in the development of coal, cement and hydro electric power A new hydro-electric plant, with a capacity of 2.7 million kilowatts, was under construction and would light up the whole of Central Asia It would have a dam, 300 metres high, which would be the highest in the world Cultivable land had increased from 20,000 hectares in 1925 to 424,000 and was being worked

with the help of 13,300 tractors. The annual output of cotton was 500,000 tons. The outturn per hectare was the highest in the USSR, and for this Tajikistan had recently been awarded the Order of Lenin. Cultural development had kept pace with economic development. Illiteracy had been abolished, and an Academy of Sciences, the youngest in the USSR, had been established. The President of Tajikistan went on with more figures, such as the number of schools of various categories, the number of students in each, and the number of books, totalling 70 million, published in Tajik, Russian and various other languages since the Revolution. By this time my head was reeling. I am allergic to figures and percentages, while the Soviet citizen revels in them. I often feel ashamed when I am at a loss to answer a question of some Soviet friend regarding the percentage by which the annual production or *per capita* income has risen in India since independence or by which illiteracy or infant mortality has gone down. To the Soviet authorities such ignorance is a sign not only of a neglected education but of lukewarm patriotism. If I had been a citizen of the USSR, I fear I would have been dubbed a poor specimen of Soviet man.

I am far more interested in human beings than in statistics. When I come across an interesting man or woman all the statistics I have heard begin to spring into life. Such a man I met at the airfield in Stalinabad when I was on the point of leaving Tajikistan. A porter, who had been standing near the big IL-18 which took us all over the Soviet Union, greeted me with the words, '*Salaam Alekum*'. He had a sailor's face, piquant, unkempt and weather-beaten, and I was drawn to him. I asked him whether he was a Tajik. 'No,' he said, 'I am a Tartar.' He had been born in Kazan, the ancient capital of the Tartar Kingdom and the present capital of the Tartar Autonomous Republic, but had not visited it for the last twenty years because he had been working in the southern parts of Russia on trains and ships and, since the war, in Central Asia. His name was Rahim Khan and he was a Muslim. He asked me whether there were many Muslims in India and I told him that we had 40 million of them. 'I thought all the Muslims were now in Pakistan,' said Rahim Khan. I asked him whether he had been to Moscow or Leningrad. He admitted he had not been himself, but said his son flew to those big cities almost every day, for he was a pilot. He had five sons, all of

them well-placed, but was himself still a manual worker. He was approaching 60, and would soon be retiring on a pension of 800 roubles a month. At that moment, a plain-clothes man, who had been watching him and me for some minutes, came up and brusquely pulled him away. Habits die hard, and some people in the USSR still have a Stalinist suspicion of Soviet citizens speaking to foreigners. They little know that the old porter, whom I met in Stalinabad, and the old teacher, whom I met in Samarkand, were more eloquent of the state of affairs in the Soviet Union than all the statistics which the President of the Republic of Tajikistan had trotted out.

CHINESE CENTRAL ASIA

URUMCHI

ON 27 September 1957 Anujee and I flew over the Heavenly Mountains (Tien Shan) from Alma Ata to Urumchi. It was like passing from paradise to purgatory. Alma Ata is a spot blessed by nature; there all was green and luxuriant. In Urumchi everything was bleak and bare; there were no trees, and even the river was devoid of water. The only sublime object was Bogdo Ola. Its triple peaks, more than 20,000 feet high, rose above the neighbouring hills even as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva rise above a multitude of lesser gods. Or to use more topical similes, as Marx, Lenin and Stalin, or Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh and Chou En-lai, rise above all others in the communist pantheon.

In 1944 I had spent two weeks in Urumchi in the course of an overland journey which took me 125 days from Delhi to Chungking. When I left Urumchi on a cold, snowy day in 1944 I little thought that one day I would return to that spot—and then come to it from the Soviet Union.

On my arrival in Urumchi in 1957 I was received by the representatives of the Sinkiang Government and by the Soviet Consul-General and his staff. Thirteen years previously, Gillett, then Consul-General in Kashgar and now British Ambassador in Kabul, had accompanied me, and we were received by the British and American Consuls. Now those Consulates have ceased to function. Even the Soviet Union and India have had to withdraw their Consulates from Kashgar in South Sinkiang, and in North Sinkiang the only Consulate left is that of the Soviet Union.

In 1944 there was no hotel suitable for foreigners in Urumchi. I was therefore accommodated in a pleasant villa, Nan Hua Yuan, where the father of the Governor, Sheng Shih-tsai, used to live and where his brother was mysteriously murdered. In 1957 we stayed in a newly constructed hotel with more than a hundred rooms, within a stone's throw of Nan Hua Yuan. Urumchi was no longer the isolated spot which it used to be before the

Revolution. Even during our brief stay there were a number of visitors, among them Hatta of Indonesia and a large youth delegation from Kazakhstan.

Since my last visit Urumchi had greatly changed. My first impression was how much more noisy and crowded it had become. I had a similar impression when I revisited Oxford in 1934, having left it twelve years earlier. In my time, Oxford was an oasis of peace, there was little traffic, dons and undergraduates scorned the use of cars, and the hooting of lorries and buses did not drown the song of birds or the music of college bells, whispering the last enchantments of the Middle Ages. But by 1934 the town had invaded the gown, Oxford had become an industrial as well as a university city. It had also become an important junction on the road from London to Birmingham, and in order to divert the traffic suggestions had been made even to desecrate the gracious meadows of Christ Church, overlooking which I spent three of the happiest years of my life.

Urumchi, like Oxford, is being drawn into the whirl of modern life, though no two towns could be more unlike. Oxford has for eight centuries been a city of learning, Urumchi—and, indeed, all Sinkiang—has for a thousand years been a vacuum—an intellectual as well as a political vacuum. In this vacuum one war lord after another used to establish his transient domain and disappear, leaving no trace on the life of the people, which continued to answer to Hobbes' description of life in primitive societies, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. Now a brave new world was rising in this area and an attempt was being made to change the very character of the people.

Not only the character, but even the composition of the people had changed. The population of Urumchi had grown from 87,000 before the Revolution to 270,000. And it had become a predominantly Chinese town. In 1944 I hardly saw a Chinese face in the bazaar, the few Chinese who were in Urumchi lived herded together in a separate quarter. But now the Chinese formed the majority, 74 per cent of the population. This influx does not appear to have roused the resentment of the local people. The Kuomintang Chinese went to Sinkiang at best to bestow the boon of Chinese civilization on the lesser breeds without the law and at worst to make themselves rich. The Chinese communists have been subtler. So far they had not made any attempts



P. N. Sharma

An Indian film in Urumchi 1957

at 'Sinovization', as the Kuomintang had done; they had shown no desire to turn young Turkis, Tartars, Kazakhs and Mongols into pale Chinese imitations. Rather, their endeavour has been to make them better specimens of their own racial type through the inoculation of socialism.

Chinese communists, however, seemed aware that it was premature to thrust the doctrines of Mao or Marx on the followers of Mohammed; and they took care not to interfere with the practice of religion. The acting Mayor of Urumchi told me that there were no less than 57 mosques in Urumchi and that all of them were working. Muslim religious leaders were not only tolerated but respected, and they were included in the various political organs in Sinkiang. The Turki language occupied a place of honour side by side with Chinese. No attempt was made to supersede the Arabic script, as had been done in the Soviet Central Asian Republics. Muslim susceptibilities were respected; in our own hotel, where a number of Russians were living, pork was not cooked or served. However, the Chinese must be hoping that, here as elsewhere, the corrosive effects of science and a secular education would make wholesome inroads into religion.

Education had made great progress in Sinkiang after the Revolution. The sight of boys and girls, somewhat shabbily dressed but going gaily to school, was a familiar one. They could be seen on the roads at all hours of the day, because the schools had to work in shifts on account of lack of space. I was told that the number of primary schools in Urumchi had risen from 13 to 33, and the number of students in primary schools from 2,500 to more than 20,000. There were now 10 high schools whereas there used to be only 4 before the Revolution. There were five colleges where there used to be one, and 10 technical institutes where there used to be none. The communists may be right in hoping that at the rate at which education is progressing in Sinkiang the ties of religion will be loosened. But they do not suspect that education may also loosen the bonds of dictatorship.

Even more amazing than the progress in education is the progress in the industrialization of Sinkiang. I must confess that Sinkiang, with its nomad tribes and its easy-going oasis peoples, is the last region on earth in which I expected industrialization to

take place In 1944 there were only three industries in Sinkiang, and they were operated by hand Now there were three dozen Even coal, cement, iron and steel were being produced in limited quantities

TANKS INTO TRACTORS

IN Sinkiang agriculture had kept pace with industry Since the Revolution, the cultivated area had increased by 48 per cent and the agricultural output by 80 per cent I was told that the agricultural operations were being rapidly mechanized and that 90 per cent of the land had been collectivized The credit for the increase in agricultural production in Sinkiang goes to a large extent to the Chinese Army When the People's Liberation Army entered Sinkiang, Mao Tse-tung ordered them to grow their own food so as not to be a burden on the people In 1950, therefore, the Army started growing food crops, though patchily and in a very perfunctory way Gradually however the Army saw that in Sinkiang, as in adjoining Kazakhstan in the USSR, there were vast virgin lands which could be turned to cultivation provided the water flowing from the mountains could be conserved So the Army set about building dams and making reservoirs They also began to tackle such cognate agricultural problems as the improvement of the soil, the removal of alkali from it and the breeding of livestock By 1953, the agricultural potentialities were seen to be so vast that an Army Production Corps was formed When I visited Sinkiang this corps, consisting of 240 000 ex-soldiers, was running 40 State Farms comprising more than 2 million Chinese acres (15 acres—1 hectare), with the help of thousands of trucks, tractors, harvester combines and a million head of livestock In addition, the corps was running an agricultural college, a college for nurses, a couple of hospitals and numerous clinics and primary schools Thus it was functioning as a state within the state General Tao Shih-Yu, the distinguished Commander-in-Chief of the corps, explained to me that soldiers were admirably suited for this work because they were inured to discipline and exertion of every kind Moreover they had a higher political consciousness than laymen And in order to keep their political consciousness up to the mark, the Commander-in-Chief was assisted by a Political Commissar

General Tao Shih-Yu was good enough to take me to the Manas region which had been recently opened up. The name 'Manas' intrigued me, for it sounded Indian. Kazanski, the Soviet Consul-General in Urumchi, told me that it came from an Indian word, and Anujee promptly connected it with the Sanskrit word *manah* or mind. General Tao Shih-Yu, however, told me that Manas was the name of a Mongol warrior who camped in this spot many centuries ago. Subsequently we came to know that Manas was the name of a great Central Asian epic in which were described the exploits of Manas, the Kirghiz hero, who had fought a hundred battles against the oppressors of the Kirghiz people and particularly against the Chinese, who are described in the epic as 'terrible and dangerous opponents'. Before the Chinese Revolution, the Soviet Government had encouraged the compilation and translation of this 'Iliad of the Steppes'; but once China became a fraternal state, Russia's enthusiasm for this anti-Chinese epic waned. And I suspected, perhaps uncharitably, that Kazanski and Tao Shih-Yu were trying to put me off the scent by their explanation of the origin of the word.

We travelled in the company of General Tao Shih-Yu for about 150 miles along the international road from Urumchi to Alma Ata. The traffic on this road was heavy. Very different was the state of affairs in 1944 when Gillett and I travelled for more than a thousand miles along the Sino-Soviet frontier from Kashgar to Urumchi. Then we saw only one vehicle, a lorry carrying a general's wife and her belongings. Now we saw trucks and lorries almost every hundred yards. Formerly, the donkey was the common means of conveyance in South Sinkiang, though in North Sinkiang horses and camels too were in use. Now the donkey was becoming obsolete, and motor transport was taking the place of animal transport. This necessitated the establishment of a plant for the repair of trucks in Urumchi, capable of handling more than 2,000 vehicles a year. It was set up at a cost of 100 million yuans by thirteen Soviet experts, who came to Sinkiang in 1950 and, having completed their job, returned to the USSR in 1953.

Sinkiang was being opened up very fast. A railway had been projected from Lanchow through Urumchi to Alma Ata in the USSR, and work was reported to have begun from both ends. A road had just been built from Karghalik in South Sinkiang to the

borders of Tibet This is the highest road in the world, formerly, it was a hazardous caravan route, and it was over this route that Sathe, the last Consul General of India in Sinkiang, and his enterprising wife rode on his return to India from Kashgar Another road was being built on the Roof of the World from Yangihissar to Tashkurghan In 1944, I took 8 days to cover this distance, soon it should be possible to do it in 8 hours On completing the 800 mile journey on foot and on horseback from India to Sinkiang in 1944, I wrote thus

No one who has a feeling for Nature will contemplate with equanimity the prospect of an Indo Sinkiang road I dread the thought that some day men may 'do' in three or four days the magnificent country which it took me forty six days to march through To enable every Tom, Dick and Harry to picnic at the foot of Nanga Parbat or Mount Rakhaposhu or cross the Mintaka or the Chichikilik Pass in his jeep, or flit past the Batura or Sassau glaciers will be a sacrilege But Nature will not permit it Armed with snow and blizzards, avalanches and landslides, she will jealously guard these regions as her last preserve against the intrusion of man

Now the Roof of the World has succumbed to the onslaught of science But I think the Karakorams will still defy it

On our way from Urumchi to Manas, we passed through a number of Tungan villages In 1934, the Tungans of Kansu led by Ma Hu shan and aided by their compatriots in Sinkiang rose against the Governor of Sinkiang and nearly overthrew him But now they showed no signs of disaffection, the Red Army was too strong About half-way to Manas, in a village called Hutupi we stopped for a few minutes and tasted some melons, dripping with honey Apart from small patches of land here and there, growing melons and vegetables, we entered a newly laid out town with avenues of poplars and a gorgeous array of flowers Hundreds of Chinese children greeted us, clapping their little hands, covering us with flowers and showering coloured rice on our heads They were led by the widow of General Chao Shih kuang, who used to be the Kuomintang general in Kashgar at the time of the outbreak of the Revolution, but lost no time in joining the communists together with his regiment

The Chinese have named the new settlement Stone River. We visited a number of farms and factories. Cotton was beginning to grow almost as well as in Uzbekistan; in fact, it was Soviet experts who taught the Chinese to grow 'cotton of the Uzbek variety. The local people had never seen cotton before or imagined that it could ever grow in this region. They were at first inclined to regard its cultivation as another symptom of the Red Army's magical powers, for magical indeed was the manner in which former soldiers of the Chinese Army had turned their swords into ploughshares and literally made the desert bloom. General Tao Shih-Yu, with all his medals and decorations, looked more a farmer than a soldier, and proved that peace had victories greater than war. When we said good-bye to him he presented us with a dozen varieties of apples grown in Stone River and asked us to accept them as 'fruits of peace'.

Socially, too, Sinkiang had changed. During my last visit beggars could be seen everywhere. Now I saw none, not even in front of the mosques, where they used to congregate and appeal to the piety of the rich who looked upon almsgiving as a simple means of salvation. Women were no longer in purdah, at any rate in the cities. At the great party given by the acting Chairman of the Sinkiang Government on the eve of the Chinese National Day, Uigur girls in jaunty embroidered caps danced with as much grace and gusto as their Russian and Chinese sisters. Every now and then one of them would come and bow before Alfred Gonsalves and whirl him off, making me regret, and Anujee be thankful for, my lack of prowess in dancing. There seemed to be complete equality between men and women and between the well-to-do and those who were not so well off. The maids who served us at dinner discarded their aprons soon afterwards and joined in the dancing. At the textile factory which we visited, the girls who poured out tea and brought in the cakes sat down with us and took an intelligent interest in our conversation and an inquisitive interest in Anujee's saree and nose-ring. I was told that the Revolution had undermined all the old feudal notions of inequality.

I wondered whether the Revolution had also removed that harrowing sense of inequality between Chinese and non-Chinese which had been responsible for many a revolt in the past. The Chinese used to betray their superiority complex in various ways. They had renamed Urumchi Ti-hwa or 'Return to Civilization'.

When I went to Sinkiang in 1944, the Governor was a Chinese, so were all the district officers throughout Sinkiang. Now the Government was headed by an Uigur, and of the four Vice-Chairmen, two were Chinese, one was a Tartar and one a Kazakh. Similarly, the Mayor was an Uigur and the Deputy Mayor a Chinese, though the latter looked the more dynamic of the two. I was told that though only 26 per cent of the population of Urumchi was non-Chinese, they had been given weightage in the Municipal Council and occupied 44 per cent of the seats. During my travels through Sinkiang in 1944, I noticed that not one of the numerous Chinese officials serving in that province had cared to learn the local language Uigur. Now it was compulsory for every Chinese official to learn Uigur, while for Uigur officials it was optional to learn Chinese.

This has resulted in an improvement in the attitude of the local people towards Chinese officials. In 1944 the whole atmosphere was different. The Kazakhs in Ilk were beginning to be restive, there were clashes between them and Chinese civilians, and the troops of the Muslim war lord, Ma Pu feng, were on their way from Kokonor to quell the revolt. At that time, there was much nervousness in Urumchi itself, and we saw Chinese families moving in dozens into the comparative security of the walled portion of the city. Now the Chinese and other races intermingled freely, and at the parade on 1 October, the National Day of China, it was the Kazakh Vice-Chairman of the Government who took the salute. In the Kuomintang days this would have been inconceivable.

'THE SPIRIT MOUNTAIN'

It is my last evening in Urumchi, for tomorrow we return to Moscow. In my room I have changed places with Anujee, because her bed commands a lovely view of the girdle of hills that surround Urumchi. As I write, the sun is setting and a brazen moon is rising ready to usurp his place for the night even before his life is extinct. In the twilight, to which the sun and the moon have made an equal contribution, every object of nature has assumed an uncanny clarity. The silhouette of the hills is so sharp that they look as if carved into the sky. Above them rise

the triple peaks of Bogdo Ola, or, as the Mongols call it, 'the Spirit Mountain'. They regard it as the abode of an Immortal Spirit. What strange doings that Immortal Spirit must have seen during the last twenty centuries! His first remembrance must be that of a long and interminable line of mules, donkeys and camels carrying the silk of China along 'the Silk Road' to Bokhara and Samarkand and the confines of the Roman Empire. Such animals as were not dead must have carried back to China the bags of bullion which the Romans paid as the price of the silk. Indeed, Mommsen, the historian, has said that the inordinate export of bullion to buy silk from China was one of the causes of the decline of the Roman Empire. A few centuries later, the Immortal Spirit must have seen strange men, with shaven heads and saffron robes, coming from the far, far south, building temples in Bugur, Kuchar and Khotan and even setting up kingdoms. In the tenth century, those kingdoms clashed furiously with other men who came from the west, with Islam in one hand and the sword in the other, declaring that Allah was the only true God and that all other gods were false. The Immortal Spirit's recollections of the events of the next thousand years must be somewhat hazy, for nothing much happened during this period, and there was stagnation in Sinkiang, relieved only by an occasional revolt, as a result of which the peoples of Sinkiang slipped out of the clutches of the Chinese dragon, only to slip back into them again. Now a new China, supported by a new Russia, has closed in on Sinkiang, bringing with her the gospel of Marx and Mao and the benefits of trucks and tractors, highways and railways. And the Immortal Spirit, disillusioned by the fate of so many kingdoms and empires, which at one time seemed to have been built on rock but proved to have been built on sand, must be wondering whether the present system will last or whether it will go the way of all previous regimes from the time of Chin Shih Huang-ti to Chiang Kai-shek.

AN ARCTIC, AND A BALTIC, PORT

MOSCOW TO MURMANSK

THE summer of 1959 was my seventh in Moscow. I had thought that it would be my last and had started preparing for our final departure from Moscow when I received a telegram from our Prime Minister, asking me if I could stay on for yet another year in the Soviet Union. I shall not mind if 1960 turns out to be like 1959. In 1959 the winter was mild and the summer was glorious. The days were generally bright and dry and warm, and when they threatened to get hot, there would come down a sudden shower, accompanied by thunder and lightning, almost reminding one of our monsoon in Kerala.

Summer, all too brief, is the period for picnics and week-ends in Moscow. Unfortunately I was unable to enjoy it to the full on account of an unending flow of visitors from Delhi to Moscow. Among them were the Minister of Steel, the Minister of Heavy Industry, the Minister of Culture and Scientific Research and the Commissioner-General for Economic Affairs in Europe and America. There was also a regular flow of non officials. With the introduction of a direct air service between Delhi and Moscow, Delhi has come within seven hours' flight from Moscow.

On 9 August we took an equal number of hours to fly, by an ordinary plane, from Moscow to Murmansk, one of the northern most towns in the USSR. When we crossed the Arctic Circle in the afternoon, I had the same thrill as when I crossed the equator many years ago. The crossing of the equator would have passed unnoticed if Neptune had not appeared on board and pushed some of the younger passengers into the swimming pool. There was no such ceremony when we crossed the Arctic Circle. Nature, however, was bent on impressing the occasion on our minds. We were suddenly confronted by dense, rain-bearing clouds, through which our plane wriggled its way as best it could. Finding the clouds impenetrable, and overcoming the average Soviet pilot's tendency to fly low, our plane shot up above the clouds and remained there for a few minutes. Then

it suddenly darted downwards, because ice was beginning to form on its wings. Whenever the clouds lifted, we had glimpses of the land below. The land, somehow, seemed to consist mainly of water. The White Sea and the Barents Sea had encroached into it; and the entire territory was deeply dented with pools and lakes. Trees were conspicuous by their absence; there were only shrubs. This time last year we were in the region of Siberian taiga; and now we were in the tundra zone.

We alighted from the plane at about 6 p.m. but the sun was still high in the heavens. A Volga met us at the airfield and drove us over 25 kilometres of bumpy road to Murmansk. Despite the bumps, it was a pleasant drive. We skirted a long low hill to our right and the Tuluga and the Kola rivers to our left until we reached our hotel, overlooking the picturesque Bay of Kola. The hotel was appropriately named the Arctic. I was given a de luxe suite which, with its chandeliers, velvet curtains and marble table-lamps was a pale imitation of the Astoria in Leningrad. There were thick and quite unnecessary double curtains over the doors between the bedroom, the sitting-room and the corridor, but the curtains over the windows, facing outside, were made of thin material. When I went to bed at 11, the sun was still shining and the street lamps had not been lit; and I could not sleep till midnight because of the light outside. Within an hour or two, I woke up because the light came streaming in. Alfred Gonsalves was wiser; he had got his maid to nail a thick blanket over his window and slept well. When he told me so the next morning, I reminded him of the considerate hostess in *Punch* who, when her guest told her that she had slept like a log, exclaimed: 'Oh, natural sleep is so wonderful!'

MURMANSK

AFTER a few hours' fitful sleep I woke up into a day which, I was told, was typically Murmanskian. For one moment the sun would shine; then the sky would be overcast; there would be a grinding drizzle or a heavy downpour; and then again the sun would appear nervously and bashfully. And for seven months in the year the sun would not shine at all. I told an official of

the city that these winter months must be terribly cold. Terrible, yes, he said, but not so cold, not much colder than Moscow, for the Gulf Stream flowed past the coast of Murmansk and kept that port open for navigation throughout the year, unlike other Arctic ports, which were closed for 250 days. Even the White Sea ports had ice for 150 days. Leningrad itself, a thousand kilometres to the south, is closed for six months, leaving to Murmansk the honour of being 'the window on Europe' in the winter.

I called on Konovolov, the Chairman of the City Soviet. A native of Belo-Russia, he had been working in Murmansk for a number of years and was proud of its progress. He told us that Murmansk was the largest polar city in the world. It was a new city, unlike Kola next door, which was founded by Novgorod traders in the thirteenth century and had given its name to the Bay on which Murmansk stood and the Peninsula in which Murmansk was situated. Murmansk was founded in 1916 towards the end of the Tsarist regime. Since then its growth has been phenomenal. In 1926 its population was about 9,000, in 1949, 117,000, and now, 226,000. For a city which is only a little over 40 years old, it has suffered much. Konovolov told me that during the Civil War it was occupied by the British and the Americans. He related with relish the story of the counter-revolution and foreign intervention when fourteen foreign armies tried to throttle the young Soviet Republic. In front of my room in the Arctic Hotel was an ugly whitewashed monument, which looked like a deformed Shivalingam on which was hung a printed inscription:

To the sufferers from the Intervention of 1918-1920. From the workers and fishermen of Murmansk, on the 10th anniversary of the triumph of the October Revolution.

During the Second World War, the port of Murmansk played a vital role, it was there that Western supplies for waging the war against Hitler were discharged. The German armies, however, bombed Murmansk almost out of existence in 1942. A woman, whom we met in Murmansk, told me that when she returned to Murmansk after the Second World War she could hardly recognize the streets, they had been covered with rubble and the entire town had been destroyed and burned. It is now being rebuilt in the usual pretentious Soviet style, with all the adjuncts of a Soviet

town—clubs, schools, theatres, technical institutes, cinemas, a television centre and a stadium. Housing, however, is still inadequate. A resident of Murmansk told us that she and her two grown-up daughters had to live in a single room of 15 square metres and that her sons-in-law too had to be accommodated when they came to Murmansk. She had been in Murmansk for 30 years but had never seen Moscow or even Leningrad, though she once saw the railway station in Leningrad on her way to the Caucasus, where she had a holiday. Life for the average worker in the Soviet Union is still hard and cramped. It is to the credit of the Communist Party that it has realized this and no longer talks of the socialist paradise of Russia, as was the fashion in Stalin's time. The paradise, they now say, is just round the corner, waiting for the Seven-year Plan to be completed.

The Chairman of the City Soviet told me that the chief industry of Murmansk was fishing. This was only too obvious as the whole place smelt of fish. A large fishing fleet was lying opposite our hotel; and we were taken round two ships and a trawler. We also visited a state farm in which silver fox and mink were reared in thousands for their valuable fur.

Murmansk was unlike any other town I had visited in the USSR. It has left a strange impression on me. It can be described as a twilight town where, in the summer months, the sun does not set or, for that matter, rise, because it hides behind a curtain of clouds like a Muslim woman behind purdah; and it has seven months of winter. Though an Arctic town, Murmansk seemed to harbour as many flies and mosquitoes as the tropics. Drunken sailors could be seen at all hours, sometimes just sufficiently drunk to wave or whistle to the girls who were passing by and eluding them, and more often too drunk even to make an amorous gesture. Yet Murmansk was conscious of its situation as the Western terminus of the great North Sea route to the Pacific Ocean and the Eastern terminus of the sea route to the Atlantic. It was heavy with memories of the humiliation it had suffered during the Civil War and the damage it had sustained in the Second World War and proud of its role in the present Seven-year Plan as a principal supplier of fish and fur in the Soviet Union.

THE KARELO-FINNISH REPUBLIC

ON 12 August we travelled by train from Murmansk to Leningrad. It was sheer vanity which prompted me to do so. I wanted to feel and boast that I had travelled on the northernmost railway in the world. I was assured by Alfred Gonsalves, who had been assured by Valia, who had been assured by Burobin, that the journey would take only 16 hours. This seemed incredibly quick by Russian standards so we asked Valia to make certain of the timings. After due inquiries Valia assured us that if we left Murmansk at 6 p.m. we would be in Leningrad at 10 a.m. the next day. On getting into the train, however, we learnt from the conductor that we would reach Leningrad not on the next day, but the next day but one, at 10 a.m. ! And so I settled down to a 40 hour train journey with Alfred Gonsalves and Michael Brecher's *Nehru* as my companions.

For the first few hours the scenery was what we had expected from our experience in the air—flat land, numerous lakes and ponds, and sparse and stunted vegetation. When we got out of the Arctic Circle, however, the sky became brighter, the trees taller and the woods denser. The forests were beautiful but did not have that primitive energy which characterized the Siberian taiga.

In the evening we passed a long lake called Imandra and at midnight we reached a town called Kandalaksha. A fellow-passenger told us that Kandalaksha was an important industrial town. I was, however, less interested in its industrial importance than in its intriguing Indian sounding name. We were now passing through the Karelo-Finnish Autonomous Republic, and of all European languages, Finnish is the closest to Sanskrit. Perhaps that accounts for the name Kandalaksha, though no one was able to explain its etymology to me.

One of the passengers with whom we became acquainted was a Komi. The Komis were amongst the original inhabitants of the Murmansk coast. Today few of them are left. I asked our companion why the Karelo-Finnish ASSR, which had been a full fledged Republic until last year, was now merged in the Russian Republic. He said that it was entirely due to administrative reasons, the Karelo-Finnish Republic was too small to be a

separate entity. He poohpoohed the idea that its amalgamation into the RSFSR was intended to blast any hopes which Finland might have cherished for regaining this region, which had once belonged to her.

Our friend was proud of Soviet achievements in this area. An engineer in the hydro-electric works in Kandalaksha, he said that that single town today produced more electricity than the whole of Russia before the Revolution. However, he was critical of some aspects of Soviet life. He noticed that the train was overcrowded. A compartment for four had been allotted to Alfred and myself and no one was allowed to occupy the spare berths. 'Why shouldn't we make friends with you?', he asked. 'These are the only opportunities we get for talking to foreigners.' Similarly a woman in Murmansk said, 'What is the use of all this Hindi-Russi Bhai Bhai, if we are never allowed to visit India?' No Soviet citizen would have uttered such sentiments in Stalin's time.

On the second day of our journey from Murmansk, we were no longer in the rolling lowlands of the Arctic Circle. We were in the region of the White Sea and the White Sea-Baltic Canal. The names of the stations in the Karelo-Finnish ASSR were written in Roman as well as Russian characters. In the evening the train stopped for about an hour in a siding to let another train pass. Seeing a lake in the neighbourhood, all the passengers got out. The men discarded their trousers and shirts, and the women their skirts and blouses, and they splashed about in the lake with whatever they had underneath. Another group of passengers formed a circle under a tree and started doing a folk dance to the music of a balalaika. These are the people for whose 'liberation' the churches of America offered prayers during the 'Captive Nations Week' at the beginning of August!

What an unconventional people the Russians are! In the restaurant there were men in uniform, in full suits, in short sleeves and in pyjamas without dressing gowns. A dressing gown is a rarity in the Soviet Union; perhaps it will appear *en masse* in the next Five Year Plan.

Passengers do not wait to be introduced to each other; as in Indian trains, they become friends straightaway and enjoy talking about their families. A woman on the train told us proudly of her seven-year-old daughter, Tania. But she had no father, she

said 'Dead?' I asked sympathetically 'No,' she replied 'He has fallen for another woman'

In the restaurant there was pandemonium. Vodka, cognac and beer flowed freely. The Party and the Government are engaged in a campaign against vodka-drinking, which they condemn as a bourgeois vice, but it does not seem to be having much effect on the proletariat of Russia.

OLD RIGA

A FLIGHT of 90 minutes from Leningrad brought us to Riga. For many years Riga had been a closed town, it was only last year that it was opened to foreigners. I had expected to find Riga different from other Soviet towns but I did not think that it would be so different. A pleasant Latvian girl met us at the airfield as the representative of Intourist. One of the first things she told us was that Riga was 'the Paris of the North'. Even the suburbs of Riga had an elegance of their own. Soon after we left the airport, we saw a number of spires and domes at a distance. Sensing our thoughts, Raya said that there were forty churches in Riga and that all of them were functioning. 'Except one,' said Gonsalves. A Catholic and *ipso facto* a church-goer, he had been feeling guilty that he could not go to church on the previous Sunday, as there was none in Murmansk. He had therefore been making inquiries about the possibility of going to church in Riga, and a Latvian fellow passenger on the plane told him that in Riga he would be able to go to as many churches as he wished. Only one, the most famous of them all, had been turned into a museum. Towering over the churches and other historic monuments in Riga stood a modern interloper, a seventeen-storied skyscraper, housing the Latvian Academy of Sciences.

We began by exploring the old city. Old Riga is not as far from New Riga as Old Delhi is from New Delhi. They lie side by side, separated by an old moat, now turned into a city canal. Riga, we were told, was founded in A.D. 1201 by one Bishop Albert who came from Bremen with twenty ships and a number of merchants. Originally the town stood on the river Riga, which has since dried up completely. Seeing what was coming, the City Fathers moved the town to its present site on the Daugawa.

(West Dvina) river as long ago as the seventeenth century. The Daugawa is a broad river, 200 metres wide where we stood, and 1200 kilometres long. Like the Volga it takes its source from the Valdai Hills in Russia. The Volga flows mainly in a south-easterly direction into the Caspian Sea and the Daugawa in a north-westerly direction into the Baltic. In a political sense the Volga has pursued the Daugawa and hung on to it since the time of Peter the Great, with the exception of twenty years between the First and Second World Wars when, to use Raya's phrase, Latvia had 'a bourgeois democratic republic' which became increasingly Fascist.

We entered the old city of Riga through the only surviving one of the nineteen gates which it once had. This gate bore the inscription '1680', meaning that it had been renovated in that year. In front of it were two guns captured by Peter the Great at the battle of Poltava. Soon after we entered the city we saw a church in which a service was going on. It was a Saturday and I wondered why a service was being held, but Alfred told me that it was an important festival day, in celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin. We went into the church and sat there for about an hour. The atmosphere was different from that of Russian Orthodox churches. The priests were less gorgeously attired; the people were more decorously dressed; the congregation had pews to sit on instead of having to stand pell-mell as in Russia; and there was greater order and perhaps less piety. I saw a long line of persons waiting in a queue, proceeding to a cubicle where a priest was sitting, and whispering something in his ear. It was the first time I had seen a confession in progress. It reminded me of Anatole France who, when a boy, used to invent and confess to the most horrible sins in order to make the priest's hair stand on end 'like quills upon the fretful porpentine'. I noticed that the majority of the persons who confessed were old women. I told Alfred that I could very well imagine a lusty lad like him having to confess frequently, but I could not think why these poor women had to. Alfred told me the story of a woman who used to go and confess every week that she had got angry with her husband who ate garlic; to bear ill-will towards one's lord and master was to sin in the eyes of the Lord. The priest finally tired of the old woman's confession and received her after having had a good bite of garlic himself. This cured her.

The church which we visited was St Jacob's, built in the thirteenth century, but there was an even earlier church which used to have the highest wooden tower in Europe. This had been destroyed by the Germans. Another old church was the Dom, with an organ of 6,883 pipes, one of the largest in Europe, and an auditorium which could accommodate 5,000 persons. It was now being turned into a museum. I only hope it will not have the same fate as the sacred Kazan Cathedral in Leningrad which has been turned into a 'Museum of Religion' and is, in fact, a display of all the iniquities committed in the name of religion.

Riga was noted for its civilian as well as its ecclesiastical architecture. The old medieval guild hall, pure Gothic, with beautiful stained glass windows, is now a conservatory of music. In the Middle Ages Riga was a very prosperous Hanseatic town. We saw a couple of fifteenth-century houses, with fierce masks outside to frighten evil spirits away, and typical Latvian chimneys running all through the inside to keep it warm. We also saw spacious store houses dating from the seventeenth century, now storing goods unknown in those days, such as electric apparatus. The streets of Riga still bear typical medieval names such as Baker Street, Buttermaker Street and Beer-brewing Street. The districts of modern Riga, however, bear very different names. They are called Lenin District, Stalin District, Kirov District, Moscow District, Proletariat District and Yurmala or Seaside District.

NEW RIGA

RAYA was one of the most interesting persons we had come across in the USSR. She had charm, knowledge, intelligence, energy and linguistic proficiency of a high order. Her English however was beginning to be affected by the company of swarms of American tourists whom she had to escort. When she told me, within a few minutes of our arrival, that Riga was 'the Paris of the North', I took her to be a Latvian patriot. Gradually, I discovered that she was one of those people to whom patriotism was not enough. Her own patriotism was merged in proletarian internationalism, of which the USSR was the spearhead.

On entering Riga, Raya drew our attention to the statue of Kirov. It was in Riga that Kirov signed the treaty under which Soviet Russia recognized the independence of Poland. Kirov was a remarkable man. I have seen statues of him all over the Soviet Union, from Baku on the Caspian Sea to Murmansk in the Arctic; and even in Leningrad there are more statues of him than of Lenin. Raya pointed out Lenin's statue to us and told us that Lenin had been in Riga as a hunted revolutionary in 1900. After this we came to a most impressive statue, called 'The Statue of Liberty'. Raya seemed a little apologetic about its existence. 'The Germans destroyed it,' she said, 'we have left it alone. We don't do away with such things, you know.' This seemed a strange remark, but we held our tongues as we had known her only for a few minutes.

The next day we had a clear look at the Statue of Liberty. One of the most arresting figures is that of a man, bound by chains and resolutely freeing himself. We asked Raya by whom it was made and when. Raya told us that it was made in 1935 by Zale, a famous sculptor. It bore the inscription 'Fatherland and Liberty' 'Liberty from whom?', we asked. 'Liberty from the Germans,' said Raya, 'for Latvia was a German colony from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century.' 'Might it not also mean liberty from Russia?', we asked. 'For after all, Russia was the overlord of Latvia from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the end of the First World War.' Raya explained that this could not be, because there was a difference between German and Russian rule. The Germans oppressed the Latvians and treated them as an inferior race, whereas the Russians treated them as equals and did everything possible to develop their culture. Raya then proceeded to give a vivid account of the atrocities committed by the Germans who occupied Riga from 1941 to 1944. They even established concentration camps, of which the most notorious was the one at Salaspils, where they killed hundreds of thousands of people.

Alfred and I duly sympathized with the people of Latvia. We asked Raya whether she was in Riga during the war. No, she said, she was with the Russian Army. Fighting?, I asked. No, she said, but she was wounded; and she lifted her skirt and showed us a scar where a German bullet had entered. 'You had better show it to your German tourists,' said Alfred to her. 'No,' she said, 'Never!' Raya said that after she had been wounded in Leningrad, she was moved to the rear. This left us perplexed.

What, we wondered, was she doing with the Russian Army? Alfred surmised that she might have been a Political Commissar

Raya was just sufficiently intimate with us to make us seek more of her company and not try to avoid it. I have come across other companions in the Soviet Union who would insist on being with us all the time and from whom we simply could not escape. Raya left us alone whenever we wanted. This enabled me to have my daily siesta and Alfred to roam about. Raya however was not quite free from feminine jealousy and did not like the idea of anyone else entering into our charmed circle. One day she accompanied us to a ballet, and during the interval Alfred met a friend of his from Moscow and promptly invited her to dinner. Alfred explained to Raya that the girl was a student in the Ballet School but it had been discovered that she had a weak heart and that she might have to give up dancing. At dinner, Raya's first question to the girl was, 'So you are going to be a great ballerina?' The girl said that she was *trying* to be a ballet dancer. 'It is no use *trying* to be one, unless you *can* be one,' said Raya. For the rest of the dinner the two women ignored each other and even Alfred and I felt the strain of their sullen hostility.

Raya must have found Alfred an inconvenient customer for he insisted on asking her about 'collectivization' in Latvia and the degree of force which accompanied it. Raya said that collectivization was effected in Latvia in five years without any coercion whatever. This seemed strange for in Poland next door less than ten per cent of the land has been collectivized so far. In Russia itself collectivization was not effected without the use of indiscriminate force. In a recent speech at Warsaw, Khrushchev said that the result that some of them were driven to desperation and actually destroyed their cattle and their implements. We therefore took with considerable scepticism Raya's assertion that collectivization in Latvia had been entirely voluntary. Was not opposition to collectivization and communism in general responsible for the mass deportations which are said to have taken place from the Baltic States to Siberia and elsewhere? Was that not the reason why Riga was closed to foreigners until recently and why the rest of Latvia and other Baltic States were still closed? How ever, we did not embarrass Raya by putting such questions to her.

(West Dvina) river as long ago as the seventeenth century. The Daugawa is a broad river, 200 metres wide where we stood, and 1200 kilometres long. Like the Volga it takes its source from the Valdai Hills in Russia. The Volga flows mainly in a south-easterly direction into the Caspian Sea and the Daugawa in a north-westerly direction into the Baltic. In a political sense the Volga has pursued the Daugawa and hung on to it since the time of Peter the Great, with the exception of twenty years between the First and Second World Wars when, to use Raya's phrase, Latvia had 'a bourgeois democratic republic' which became increasingly Fascist.

We entered the old city of Riga through the only surviving one of the nineteen gates which it once had. This gate bore the inscription '1680', meaning that it had been renovated in that year. In front of it were two guns captured by Peter the Great at the battle of Poltava. Soon after we entered the city we saw a church in which a service was going on. It was a Saturday and I wondered why a service was being held, but Alfred told me that it was an important festival day, in celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin. We went into the church and sat there for about an hour. The atmosphere was different from that of Russian Orthodox churches. The priests were less gorgeously attired; the people were more decorously dressed; the congregation had pews to sit on instead of having to stand pell-mell as in Russia; and there was greater order and perhaps less piety. I saw a long line of persons waiting in a queue, proceeding to a cubicle where a priest was sitting, and whispering something in his ear. It was the first time I had seen a confession in progress. It reminded me of Anatole France who, when a boy, used to invent and confess to the most horrible sins in order to make the priest's hair stand on end 'like quills upon the fretful porpentine'. I noticed that the majority of the persons who confessed were old women. I told Alfred that I could very well imagine a lusty lad like him having to confess frequently, but I could not think why these poor women had to. Alfred told me the story of a woman who used to go and confess every week that she had got angry with her husband who ate garlic; to bear ill-will towards one's lord and master was to sin in the eyes of the Lord. The priest finally tired of the old woman's confession and received her after having had a good bite of garlic himself. This cured her.

What, we wondered, was she doing with the Russian Army? Alfred surmised that she might have been a Political Commissar.

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Latvian nationalism has now been scotched but not killed. Alfred was told by a person whom he met in a cafe that there had been a large influx of Russians into Riga; they now numbered about 60 per cent of the population. A Deputy Minister in the Government of Latvia, who had recently opposed the further flow of Russian personnel into Riga, was said to have been charged with bourgeois nationalistic tendencies and dismissed from his post.

Politics apart, Riga struck us as a charming city, and Raya was an indefatigable guide. On our first day she showed us the old monuments. On the second day she took us to the seashore, some 25 kilometres away. It was a Sunday, and the whole population of Riga seemed to have overflowed on to the beach, where the sand, unlike the cobbly, shingly sand on the shores of the Black Sea, was smooth and silken. Though it was midday and the sun was shining, the water was still so cold that people could only splash about instead of bathing. The entire sea coast was dotted for about 30 kilometres with a continuous string of sanatoria, rest-homes and dachas, in one of which Khrushchev stayed when he recently came here with the East German Prime Minister. We visited the most famous of the sanatoria, the Kemerī, named after a woodcutter who discovered mineral springs there more than a century ago. We were told that to drink water from these springs was to get five years younger and to walk under an oak there was to fall instantly in love. This seemed to have an effect on Alfred, who deserted me the next day and spent the whole afternoon with a couple of friends on the seashore. I myself spent the evening at the theatre, seeing Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. Wagner is popular in Latvia because he was a conductor at the Opera Theatre in Riga.

Riga is surrounded by pine-woods. In the middle of them we saw an open-air theatre which could hold 30,000 people. A strange feature of Riga is the existence of a number of beautiful cemeteries. They stretch for miles and give one the feeling that the dead are as much at home in Riga as the living. These cemeteries belong to different communities, the Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists and adherents of the Russian Orthodox Church. There is even a Muslim cemetery in which Tartars used to be buried. One of the Tartars was a wealthy maker of cigarettes before the Revolution, but the days of private

enterprise are gone. We visited a modern cemetery, the occupants of which are bound not by a common religion but by common death in the First World War. It is beautifully laid out and a flower garden there was one of the best I have seen anywhere. At the entrance there is a line of linden trees, representing young women mourning. Then come oak trees, the symbol of strength in Latvian folklore. In the centre of the cemetery is Mother Latvia mourning over the dead sons lying at her feet, some in individual graves, others collectively. The most famous of the dead is Zale the sculptor, whose grave bears the simple inscription 'Here lies Zale, who designed the Statue of Liberty.'

We also visited another cemetery where men were buried without religious rites. It corresponds to the famous *Noroderich* in Moscow and is the resting place of famous writers, artists and statesmen. In the centre is the grave of Rainis, a great writer and a firm disbeliever, who spent many years in exile for his unorthodox views. Above his grave is a beautiful piece of sculpture representing a young man shaking off sleep and rising into the day with the words 'Strong and mighty, I shall soar to the sun again.'

Raya impressed on us the remarkable manner in which industry and agriculture had been developing in Latvia during the last decade. Prior to the Revolution, Latvia was essentially an agricultural state, and the only industry was a few textile mills. Now, little Latvia with a population of 2.2 million was producing electrical goods, trains, trams, radios and refrigerators. In the agricultural field, Latvia had taken up Khrushchev's challenge to the Soviet people to overtake the USA in the production of milk, butter and meat. Already, Latvia has surpassed the USA in the production of milk and caught up with her in butter, but was still lagging behind her in the production of meat.

We were also impressed by the cultural development of Latvia and visited some of her museums and picture-galleries. Apart from the opera *Tannhauser*, we saw *Chopiniana* and *Staburadze*, a Latvian ballet. The ballerinas in Riga could hold their own against those in Moscow, but the male dancers were decidedly inferior. *Staburadze* is based on a popular legend. The heroine falls in love with a boatman on the river Daugawa. Her father insists on her marrying a rich dandy and expels the boatman from the town. He proceeds to the river goddess, Daugawa, who falls

in love with him and refuses to part with him. The heroine goes to the goddess and implores her to return her lover to her, but is refused and is turned into a stone on the bank of the river which can still be seen. A hydro-electric project is now under contemplation, as a result of which the legendary stone will disappear. The people of Latvia have been protesting against this proposal; and not long ago a deputation went to Moscow to represent the sentiments of the Latvians to the authorities. However, it is unlikely that their prayers will be heeded for, as Raya put it, Latvia today needs power more than folklore.

On the first day in Riga, Raya had introduced the city to us as 'the Paris of the North'. On our last day, she told us that Riga was 'the pearl of the Baltic'. We agreed and we thanked her for revealing its beauty to us. If 'the pearl of the Baltic' has lost some of its spiritual lustre, it has gained in material value.

POLAND

AUTUMN

AUTUMN has become my favourite season. It is a sad period of the year, and I do not know why I am enamoured of it. Perhaps because I myself am in the autumn of life. I had hoped to see the autumn in Hungary at the end of September 1953, but I was a little too early the Hungarians were basking in what they call 'grandmother's summer'. While I was enjoying the mellow sunshine of Hungary, Anujee had to bear the discomforts of an expiring summer in Moscow. By the time I returned to Moscow, the summer was gone. Winter seemed to have come and, with it, rain and cold. The cold set in so early that central heating had to be turned on a month in advance of the prescribed date. Still the leaves of the trees refused to change colour. The summer in Moscow was behaving like a man who was dying and yet was not prepared to relinquish his hold on life. And nature wept copiously over this eerie spectacle.

It was on such a day, cold and rainy, that I left Moscow for Warsaw. Ram and Shaila accompanied me. Also Pillai, my Private Secretary. The flight was miserable except when our plane, defying the average Russian pilot's inveterate tendency to fly low, occasionally flew over the clouds and into the sun. At Minsk, where we stopped for an hour, we tried to warm ourselves by imbibing vodka. Though it did not cheer our souls it deadened our senses and we went to sleep for the rest of our journey.

In Warsaw we were accommodated in a lovely villa in Łazienki Park. I was told that the park had been laid out, and the villa built, by the last king of Poland, Poniatowski. Not far from the villa is a palace in which the king used to live, and the villa was his hunting lodge. Poniatowski was a great lover of art and did much to beautify Warsaw. He was also a lover of Catherine the Great. This did not deter her from joining in the partition of Poland and depriving that hapless country of its independence for a century and a quarter.

On my arrival in Warsaw, my thoughts hovered not so much over the history of Poland as over the beauty of the woods. There, on the banks of the Vistula, autumn, which eluded us on the Danube and the Moskva, had us in thrall. Its glory could be seen from our villa, which was situated in a beautiful garden. The trees had assumed the brilliant colours of autumn, red and yellow and purple. Here and there among them was a stubborn tree, an evergreen, which refused to respond to the seasons, like a woman so jealous of her virginity that she is deaf to the call of love. But the other trees do not envy her; they change their colours, shed their leaves and put them forth, blush and fade, live and die and spring into life again. Well might the glowing birch in front of my window, ready to die gloriously for the winter exclaim:

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But oh, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light.

RECONSTRUCTION OF WARSAW

My first visit to Warsaw was not as Ambassador, for India had not yet exchanged diplomatic missions with Poland, but as a guest, invited to the opening of an Indian Art Exhibition. I had to say a few words on that occasion. The Protocol Department expressed a desire to see my speech beforehand. It was approved by them but they gently and hesitatingly asked me if I minded making a mention of Bierut, the Prime Minister. In Stalin's time it was customary, and indeed obligatory, for every speaker to extol him. That was part of 'the cult of personality' which flourished then and which was now being denounced in the USSR. Evidently the cult had not yet disappeared in Poland.

On the day after our arrival, we went round the city of Warsaw with two charming Poles, Janowski, a brilliant architect, and Szymanowski, a promising member of the Foreign Office. Both spoke perfect English and had a polish peculiarly English. I could not help thinking that if these men were typical specimens,

the people of Poland belonged more to Western than Eastern Europe

In Warsaw I did not know which impressed me more, the extent of its destruction or the scale of its reconstruction. Before the war, Warsaw was a flourishing city, with wide variations of wealth and poverty, slums and palaces, few industries and many churches. By the end of the war nothing was left of Warsaw. The city was a ruin. Six hundred thousand people, or about half the population, had perished. Four-fifths of the city had been destroyed and the remainder damaged. 'Warsaw,' said Hitler, 'is now a mere mark on the map.'

Destruction came to the city in three stages, the first being the terrific bombing and bombardment of September 1939. Poland was Hitler's first victim. In three weeks Warsaw was at his feet, and on 5 October he held a great victory parade in Warsaw. There followed the long darkness of German occupation which lasted till January 1945.

During this period there were two great nightmares. One was in 1943, when the Jewish ghetto was destroyed by Hitler. In the centre of the city had stood this ghetto, inhabited by 200,000 Jews. Hitler, who believed that he had been divinely ordained to destroy the Jews, would not leave them alone. He began by deporting them in thousands to concentration camps. Gradually, stories came out about the frightful deeds being done in these camps. The Jews of Warsaw decided to rise rather than die the dog's death which was all they could expect at the hands of Hitler. They rose, their rising was mercilessly crushed, and the ghetto was blown to pieces. The final attack was made on Hitler's birthday, the 19th of April. All that remained, and remains, of the ghetto are two school buildings, spared because they had been occupied by SS men. In the centre of what had been the Jewish ghetto, we saw a memorial to the men who fell in the rising of 1943. On one side, there are the figures of Anillewicz, the young man who led the revolt, and of his compatriots, listening to his words with the light of freedom in their eyes. On the other side is a harrowing sculpture of the forced evacuation. A party of Jews—old men, women and children—are leaving Warsaw, they know not whither, with the Nazi bayonets gleaming at their backs. Each face is a study in expression—one, of suppressed anguish, another, of concentrated fear, a third, of benumbed

bewilderment. One face shines above the others, the face of an elder, carrying the Holy Book in his hands, and looking as if he had already commended his soul to the Almighty. This piece of sculpture is a masterpiece of its kind. It was executed by a Polish artist, Rapaport Nathan, on Swedish stone which Hitler had hoped to use for a great Victory Memorial in Berlin.

The final stages of the destruction of Warsaw occurred in the final months of the war. By that time German power was collapsing, and the Red Army was advancing. But the people of Warsaw could not wait. Their pent-up indignation against Germany broke the bounds of discretion and they dashed themselves desperately against the still remaining might of the German army. They were beaten, and Hitler decided to destroy Warsaw once for all. The population was evacuated and then street by street, house by house, every building in Warsaw was dynamited and destroyed. 'No Pole,' wired the Commandant of the German garrison in Warsaw, 'shall ever live again in Warsaw.'

Yet the Poles returned in their thousands and by 1953 the population had risen to 900,000. It was estimated that the population would reach its pre-war total of 1,300,000 by 1960. The decision to rebuild Warsaw was not taken without hesitation, for the capital had been reduced to rubble, and some thought that it would be best to locate the capital elsewhere. But memories remained, memories of the past of Poland; and we saw Warsaw rising, like the phoenix, from the ashes of utter destruction.

It was interesting to see a socialist city being rebuilt in accordance with nationalist traditions. Churches were being rebuilt with reverent care; and attempts were being made to restore them according to the old style, whether Gothic, Renaissance, or rococo. The historic market square, with its spacious mansions and beer halls and restaurants, was also being rebuilt exactly according to the old design. We went into one of those restaurants, the Crocodile, and had a cup of coffee. In the antique interior even the waitresses were dressed in sixteenth-century costumes. In the town ancient monuments were being restored one after another. The statue of King Sigismund, king of Poland as well as of Sweden, with his sword in one hand and a cross in the other, had been found lying on the ground when the Germans left: now he was aloft on his pedestal. Copernicus was back in his seat. A statue of Dzerzhinsky, a Polish revolutionary who took part

in the rising of 1905 and played such an important role in the establishment of communism in Europe that his ashes are buried in the Kremlin, had also been restored. So had the statue of Kulinski, an old shoemaker who, at the end of the eighteenth century, raised the standard of revolt against the Tsars and became a national hero. Thus the old landmarks were coming into their places one after another.

One building stood apart from the rest, the Palace of Culture. This enormous skyscraper 230 metres high, housing theatres, cinema halls, museums, health centres, swimming pools, an auditorium for 6 000 persons and, above all, the Central Academy of Sciences, was a gift from the Soviet Union. It was built out of material provided entirely, and by technicians provided mostly, by the Soviet Union. While appreciating the benevolence of the Soviet Government, I could not help wondering whether the patriotic Poles, sensitive to a fault, would not regard this building, standing aloft in the middle of the city and dominating it, as a symbol of their dependence on the Soviet Union.

CRACOW

ONE evening we left Warsaw by train, in a luxurious saloon placed at our disposal by the Polish authorities. It was elegantly furnished with red carpets and rich curtains. Though we were to stay in a hotel in Cracow, our Polish butler accompanied us just to give us an early morning breakfast before we got off at Cracow. He was not one of those comrades who wait on you with proletarian nonchalance, nor was he one of those perfect English butlers to whom Noel Coward was referring when he said that the trouble with American women was that they expected in their husbands a perfection which English women only expected in their butlers. He combined the efficiency of an English butler with the familiarity of a Jeeves.

It was barely dawn when we reached Cracow. The mayor came into our saloon accompanied by two or three councillors, and after the introductions were over, the mayor let off a rather long and obviously rehearsed speech on the friendship between India and Poland. We had all been standing, and as I began to

reply I found that, whenever I began a sentence, the engine would start, the train would give a jerk, and I, together with my audience, would sway to the right or to the left. Shaila felt that she had a special responsibility for my back, so her amusement was tinged with anxiety. She therefore suggested that we might continue the proceedings sitting.

Among those who came to greet us was a professor of the University of Cracow, who was to show us round. We could not have had a more delightful guide. Obviously he was a man of learning, but learning sat lightly on him. As he took us from place to place the whole panorama of Polish history unrolled itself before our eyes, yet he interspersed his narratives with so much humour and so many anecdotes that we were enthralled rather than overwhelmed by his talk. A professor to the tips of his fingers, he was at once vastly erudite and delightfully light-hearted. With his

Quips and cranks, and wanton wiles,
Nods, and becks, and wreathèd smiles

he endeared himself to us, and we felt perfectly at home with him.

We spent a morning in Cracow. We could have spent a week or a month there, for Cracow is full of treasures, artistic and historic. Actually, we felt we had merely 'done' Cracow in the fashion of American tourists. Despite our professor-guide's skill in exposition our impressions of Cracow were somewhat bewildered for our memories could not retain more than a fraction of the many interesting things he showed us and told us about. The overall impression remains of a city of great beauty, antiquity and culture. Balzac spent his honeymoon in Cracow and wrote ecstatically about it. 'Doubtless,' remarked the professor, 'his writings were affected by the rapture of his honeymoon.' Vitello and Copernicus taught in the University of Cracow, the second oldest in Europe, 'older,' said the professor with a twinkle in his eye, 'than any next door'. Lenin spent two years there, from 1912 to 1914, feverishly pouring forth a stream of books and pamphlets in anticipation of the capitalist war which he hoped to turn into a class war.

Present-day Cracow dates from the thirteenth century. A much older town was destroyed during the Tartar invasions of

the twelfth century, and below a beautiful Gothic church we saw the remains of a temple dedicated to heathen gods

Cracow is full of churches. Not only churches, but synagogues. There are 6 synagogues and 70 churches here, including a Lutheran and a Syrian. If the beauty of ecclesiastical architecture is spread over some seventy churches, the grandeur of the city is concentrated in a single building, the Royal Castle. Not that there are no other objects of interest. The great market place, one of the most flourishing in the Middle Ages, was worth seeing and so was the Drapers' Hall which reminded us that the medieval guilds were often powerful enough to dictate their terms to kings and nobles. The most imposing building however was the Royal Castle, the residence of the rulers of Poland from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries. It is when one thinks of the Royal Castle, with all its treasures, that one's memory reels. Among the objects that rise to the mind are the spacious courtyard, in the Renaissance style, with its elegant columns supporting the stately heads of Roman emperors and empresses, polished floors of multicoloured marble, the magnificent coronation room, which was turned into a beer hall by the Germans during their occupation of Poland, the House of Lords, which was used as a cinema for German soldiers, the gorgeous reception room for ambassadors, called 'Under the Hats', the cell for meditation in which some Indian yogis are said to have stayed in 1308, numerous portraits of kings and queens by famous painters Dutch, Flemish and Italian, a stirring picture of the battle of Lepanto by Velasquez, an adorable dark Virgin and dark Christ, rich tapestries, some of which had been deposited for safety in Canada during the war and which, owing to technical reasons, the Canadian Government is still unable to return to the Polish authorities, and, above all, the Altar, built in 1489 by a master craftsman, representing various vicissitudes of life, and, in the subtlety and humanity of the treatment of this theme marking the transition of Europe from the medieval to the modern period. Beneath the Royal Castle is a crypt in which are buried not only kings and princes but also other national heroes. Prominent among them are Mickiewicz, the greatest Polish poet, who wrote until he was 34, and after fighting in the Revolution of 1848 forsook poetry for politics, and Kosciuszko, the Polish patriot who took part in the American Revolution and left all his wealth for the freeing of Negro slaves in America.

and was hailed by his friend Jefferson as 'the purest voice of liberty'. There lies also a heretic—now called progressive, said our guide drily—Bishop Maurus, who was condemned to be buried in the pathway of the chamber, so that all visitors might trample on his impious bones. We did so, too, not knowing who he was.

NOWA HUTA

IN the afternoon we were taken to a new industrial city, Nowa Huta, which is rising aggressively within a few miles of Cracow. Now our guide was an architect or, as he himself would have it, *the* architect who designed Nowa Huta. He was very different from the professor. The professor had the humility of wisdom; the architect, the pride of knowledge. The professor did not have an unkind thing to say about anything or anybody; the architect did not have a kind thing to say about anything or anybody in the past. His eyes were firmly riveted on the future. 'Do you know what you are going to see?', he asked grandiloquently. 'A socialist city!' 'And do you know what socialism means?' he continued. 'Industry plus culture!' He then drew a number of comparisons between the old type of architecture and the new. In the old days people indulged in architecture for its own sake; now the goal of architecture was man. In the old days architecture was based on mechanical engineering; now, on social engineering. In the old days architecture was characterized by waste; now, by economy. In the old days architecture encouraged individual living; now, community living. And so he went on and on until we felt convinced that while the professor was a humanist, the architect was a braggart.

The architect explained to us that Nowa Huta would produce two million tons of steel a year, 'more, mind you, than the total quantity produced in the whole of Poland before the war'. The total steel production in pre-war Poland was about $1\frac{1}{2}$ million tons. It was now rising to $4\frac{1}{2}$ million; and by the time Nowa Huta was completed, it would rise to 7 million tons. At this point I interposed a question. I said that Nowa Huta reminded me of a steel city in Hungary which I had visited, namely, Sztalinvoros. When I saw it in February 1953, the Government of Hungary

was extremely enthusiastic about it, but when I went to Hungary again in September, I found that their views had changed. They felt they had been carrying out industrialization too fast and too far. In fact, even Rakosi said that they had forgotten the first socialist principle, which was that the state existed for man. The Hungarians had accordingly slowed down the development of industry and postponed the completion of Sztalinvoros. When I asked whether such a development was likely to take place in Poland our architect guide replied indignantly, 'No!' He did not know what had transpired in Hungary, but in Poland their industrial programme was well within the country's capacity. Hungary, he said, had few natural resources and had to rely for coal on the Soviet Union. Poland, on the contrary, was abundant in natural resources. No, he repeated, they would not slow down on Nowa Huta. Nowa Huta was eternal. He made this assertion with the same assurance with which a Muslim might say that Mecca was eternal or a Hindu, Benares.

Our guide then rattled off a number of facts and figures. He said 120 villages had had to give way for the construction of Nowa Huta. It covered an area of 1,100 acres and would accommodate 100,000 workers. In a capitalist city, the productive section of the population would only be 30 per cent of the total but in a socialist city it would be 50 per cent. This was achieved partly by relieving able-bodied mothers of the need of taking care of their children. The children belonged to the state and were looked after by the state. In Nowa Huta the state would provide kindergartens for 85 per cent of the children and crèches for 60 per cent of the babies, and there would be one school for every 5,000 of the population. 160 kilometres of road had been built already, 520 stores had been constructed, and 29,000 apartments, fitted with gas and electricity, were ready for occupation. On our way back I was attracted by two or three houses which had been painted blue. I asked whether this had any special significance and was told it meant that a girl in the house was waiting to be married. 'Let us go in,' I said flippantly, to provide a diversion from our guide's interminable statistics.

On the way back our car stopped at a bend of the road from where we could see both Cracow and Nowa Huta. On one side we could see the multistoried building blocs, chimneys and furnaces, on the other, the spires, towers and turrets of Cracow,

gleaming in the sun. There, said our guide, with outstretched arms, lies Cracow; and there lies Nowa Huta. Which would you prefer? He asked his question and did not pause for an answer. It was just as well that he did not, for we might have told him the truth.

THE FACTORY OF DEATH

But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine:
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood.

I CAME across these lines when I was eighteen years old. I was so struck with their power and beauty that I learned them by heart. I have often recited them to myself and to my children and shall now do so to my grandchildren. Those lines have come back to me on many occasions, when I saw a Grand Guignol play in London or read a tale of mystery and imagination by Edgar Allan Poe or heard some grisly ghost story related by our village astrologer. But not until I saw the secrets of the prison house in the Nazi concentration camp in Oswiecim did I experience horrors exceeding those of Hamlet on the battlements.

The atmosphere of the camp, where four million people were done to death, was the more horrible in contrast with the beauty of the countryside. We left Cracow in the early morning and drove for about 60 kilometres. The landscape was far more pleasant than around Moscow, not monotonously flat but gently undulating. One Cracovian village after another rose to view, with its cottages and churches, its poplars and pine trees and its still uncollectivized farms. Oswiecim itself is an old town, dating from the Middle Ages. At one time it was celebrated in romance and literature. Here lived a brother and sister who fell tragically

in love with each other and perished. Their story has been put to music by a famous Polish composer, Karlovich, in his *Stanislas and Anna of Ostrecim*.

In the Oswiecim camp our guide was one Walsky who had been an inmate of the camp from 1943 to 1945. He was only sixteen years old then. We asked him why he had been taken to the camp. He said that in 1943 three Germans were found shot somewhere near Warsaw. Unable to find the culprits, the Nazis decided to punish three whole villages. The villages were evacuated, the buildings razed to the ground and the inhabitants sent hither and thither, some to Germany and others to various concentration camps. Walsky himself, together with his father, mother, brother and sister, were sent to Oswiecim. At the end of the war the only survivor was himself.

Walsky related to us the various kinds of torture to which the prisoners were subjected. There were of course floggings, hangings and shootings. The instruments with which the prisoners were flogged, the scaffolds on which they were hanged and the wall against which they were shot were shown to us. We were told that no less than 200,000 prisoners had been shot against a wall in the courtyard. Hangings were sometimes individual, sometimes in mass. We saw the scaffold on which individual hangings were carried out as well as the larger scaffolds on which many could be hanged at the same time. In addition, the Nazis adopted various methods of torture which showed a fiendish ingenuity. Men were used as guinea pigs for experimental purposes, various kinds of sera being injected into them to see their reaction. Many were starved to death. I was reminded of a sadistic Maharaja who, because his State elephant did not behave sufficiently ceremoniously at a royal procession, decided to starve it to death. Thousands died of overwork. At the entrance to the camp were the words '*Arbeit Macht Frei*', which means 'Work makes you free'. Prisoners, I was told, used to crack jokes about this motto. Work, indeed, did make them free, give them that ultimate freedom, freedom from existence. But the most hideous and characteristic contribution of the Nazis to the art of genocide was death on a mass scale in gas chambers.

These gas chambers were located at the back of a camp, covering some 400 acres and intended for 80,000 inmates at a time. The entire camp, with its gas chambers, furnaces, barracks, neat

pathways and trim hedges, was laid out by the victims themselves. Amongst the inmates were citizens from eighteen countries in Europe. There were separate barracks for Jews, Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, gipsies, and other inferior orders of creation. The beds in these barracks were nothing but planks placed on top of one another. Ten or a dozen people were forced to sleep on a bed which was barely wide enough for two. There was no flooring, only the bare earth; and for ceiling there was only canvas. The clothing was scanty; the food was execrable; and there was always the danger of epidemics, especially dysentery and typhoid. The simplest way in which epidemics were dealt with was by sending anyone who had the slightest temperature to the gas chamber lest he should ultimately infect the SS men.

The railway bringing the victims for this Moloch used to run right into the camp. In order to induce people to come to the camp without much ado and with all their earthly belongings, they were assured, before the journey began, that they were being taken to England to be exchanged for German prisoners; and it was pathetic to hear many of these men, who were brought in closed vans, asking: 'Is the English Channel near?' Before they disembarked they were forced to write letters to their relations and friends saying that they were approaching England and that they had had a comfortable journey.

Once they entered the camp they were separated into two groups, namely, the more able-bodied ones who could be used temporarily for labour in and outside the camps, and the others. The others were put into various categories; those who were to be executed immediately, two weeks later, a month later, and so on. They were then led into the gas chamber as if to the bath room. These gas chambers were fitted with contraptions which looked like shower baths. Into these chambers, which could deal with 1,200 persons at a time, were shoved men and women and children. Some suspected what was in store for them, most were ignorant. The doors were then closed, gas was turned on, and people would die in agony within a few minutes. Through mirrors, specially fitted for the purpose, German scientists would watch the effects of gas on the human system. The gas chambers could dispose of 40,000 persons in 24 hours; but the crematoria could only manage 12,000 persons. Therefore the Germans resorted to open-air burnings, which spread their baleful glow over the

sky and their dreadful odour over the surrounding countryside

We were then taken to another camp which contained the remnants of the gruesome drama which was enacted here from 1940 to 1945. We saw thousands of artificial limbs, the possessors of which were always sent to the gas chambers—they were only fit to die, not to live—tens of thousands of hair-brushes, tooth-brushes, toys and shoes and, more terrible than all, two tons of hair taken from 32,000 women who had been sent to the gas chambers. As soon as the women were asphyxiated their heads were carefully shaven and the hair collected and sent to Germany to be used for the manufacture of rugs and bedspreads. We saw some of these rugs and bedspreads, too.

By this time we were all feeling sick, Shaila's nose was getting redder and redder and her eyes more and more moist. Her husband, however, remained unmoved and even thought that there was a certain exaggeration and showmanship in what we saw. Shaila resented the very suggestion that it was not all true. I took her part, as I always do in any altercations between husband and wife, and reminded Ram that after all the majority of the four million victims were Jews and that their oppressor had said in *Mein Kampf* 'In destroying the Jews I firmly believe I am fulfilling the purpose of the Almighty.'

Before leaving the camp, I was asked whether I would like to enter a few remarks in the Visitors' Book. All I could say was that having seen this camp I felt more convinced than ever that the only salvation for humanity lay in the gospel of non-violence which was preached by the prophets of old and reaffirmed in our own time by Mahatma Gandhi.

SPRING

EARLY in May 1954 I went to Warsaw again to present my credentials as India's first Ambassador to Poland. Ram Sathé accompanied me in order to assist at the ceremony and then left for India. Shaila had already left by sea, together with Mohini, her child, another child in embryo, a sick nanny with a weak heart and 35 cases of luggage. I greatly miss them both, especially

Shaila, who used to regale me with stories of the doings—official, social and amorous—of the members of the diplomatic corps.

On our arrival in Warsaw, Anujee discovered that she had brought with her someone else's bag; her own bag had gone with some British business man to Prague. What must have been his surprise when he opened the bag and saw its contents! It contained a number of articles which showed her interest in the other world—a rosary, a brass lamp, a bottle of coconut oil, a number of wicks, some sticks of incense and a quaintly shaped stone from the Ganges. In the Middle Ages a woman going about with such things might have been taken for a saint—or a witch!

It was spring in Warsaw. In Moscow spring had been painfully, fitfully, and somewhat unsuccessfully struggling with winter. In the second week of April it looked as if spring had succeeded in unseating winter; and I nearly issued orders for the central heating to be stopped. Then came a bitter blast from Siberia, followed by a fall of snow; and the temperature dropped to zero again. We were wrapped up in our cardigans and overcoats when we left Moscow.

The sun was bright when we arrived in Warsaw and men were wearing light summer suits. In our fur coats and cardigans we looked quite outlandish. I felt like a man in a dress suit at a dinner party where everyone else is in dhotis and shirts. Polish children, lightly clad, were happily basking in the sun. Young leaves crowding the trees were specially attractive. When I had last seen those trees in October, they were glorious with the thousand tints of autumn. I cannot say which appeals to me more, the blushing beauty of spring or the dazzling glory of autumn. As well might Mark Antony have hesitated between the tender sweetness of some village maiden in her teens and the infinite variety of Cleopatra who was 48 when she cast her spell on him and for whom he cast the world aside.

ZELAZOWA WOLA

ONE of our pleasantest excursions from Warsaw was to Chopin's home in a lovely spot with a liquid name—Zelazowa Wola. We nearly gave up the trip as I woke up with a racking headache, the result of the previous night's dissipation. We had invited to

dinner the head of a mission, who seemed very friendly. For his sake we even sacrificed the pleasure of attending the première of the new ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*, for which we got tickets at the last moment. We had tried to induce our guest to come with us, but he excused himself, saying that he had a previous engagement. Ramamurti discovered that his engagement consisted in playing cards with his Polish maid.

Our guest had spent many years in Russia and had naturally acquired a taste for vodka. As host I tried to keep pace with him. The first glass made me think that after all the Russians were right in calling it 'the little sunshine in the stomach'. The second made me feel the warmth more than the glow of the sunshine. The third made me positively hot and the fourth and subsequent glasses gave me a feeling of having dynamite, not sunshine, in my stomach. The vodka was followed by a Polish wine, which our guest's Secretary chose for us. By 10.30 the dinner was over. Anujee and I had been looking forward to our beds when our guest gently suggested that we might perhaps have coffee and liqueurs in the dance hall. The hall was overcrowded and it was with difficulty that we got a table. In a space where some twenty couples could have danced with comfort there were some two hundred, jostling against one another, treading on one another's toes and revolving where they stood rather than dancing. The heat and the stench from the bodies and the liquors were unbearable. However, our guest seemed to enjoy it all. He kept his eye on every pretty face and every protruding bosom. By midnight Anujee and I had had enough of it and, with due apologies to our guests, retired to our bedroom leaving Ramamurti, a teetotaler and a vegetarian, to look after our guests. I understood from Ramamurti that, after we left, our guests were in still greater form and stayed on till 2.30.

Instead of leaving for Zelazowa Wola at 9.30 we left at 11.30 in the morning. It was a raw day and the sky was overcast. The drive of 50 kilometres was not as pleasant as we had hoped.

The gardens of Chopin's home were beautiful. The apple-blossoms were past their prime, but the lilac was in full bloom and many another plant and shrub proclaimed the glory of spring. All honour to the wealthy Duke, for whom Chopin's mother kept house, and who left the lovely house and garden for Chopin so

that, away from the world's turmoil, he might compose to his heart's content. But, alas, the world would not leave him alone. The political situation in Poland compelled him to leave Warsaw for Paris. He carried a box of Polish earth which was to be buried with him. And in Paris one woman after another, culminating in the egregious George Sand, entered his life, stirred his soul, and enriched his music.

On every Sunday Chopin's music is played in his house between 11 and 1. We reached Zelazowa Wola just in time to hear the last part of it. We joined the large crowd of listeners—one might almost say, worshippers—who had been listening with rapt attention. Cars, buses, and charabancs had brought large numbers of people to Zelazowa Wola. This spectacle reminded me of the crowds we saw in Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy's home. Jehovah and Jesus Christ may stand debunked under communism, but Tolstoy and Chopin continue to receive the worship of men in Soviet Russia and Communist Poland.

RELIGION, CULTURE AND COMMUNISM

IN 1955 we visited Warsaw during Easter and found most of the hotel staff was observing, or at least enjoying, the festival with the result that we had to have our dinner before 7, make our own beds, clean our own shoes and do with little central heating at a time when the temperature was still below zero. The churches, however, were full of life. We went into a church on Sunday. As we saw the service, listened to the music and watched the devout faces of the congregation which, unlike the churchgoers in Moscow, consisted not only of old people, but of young and old, civilians and soldiers, and men and women from every walk of life, I could not help wondering how this highly Catholic country could ever take permanently to the philosophy of dialectical materialism. The Government know that Poland is intensely Christian. They are prepared to let it remain Christian, but not Roman or Catholic. Christianity, the life and gospel of Christ, is to the communists an idle fairy-tale, but Roman Catholicism is a menace to the state and the Vatican is a hotbed of reaction.

During our first visit to Poland, 2 number of Polish Bishops were being tried for anti-state activities. Soon after their trial Cardinal Wyszynski, the primate of Poland, disappeared. It was announced that he had, at his request, been allowed to retire into a monastery, the name of which was not disclosed. Since then the Government of Poland have been cultivating the so-called 'patriotic priests' with leftist leanings. Largely as a result of their efforts all the Bishops in Poland have taken an oath of allegiance to the Government. This was done on 18 December 1954, at a ceremony held in the office of the Council of Ministers. The Bishops swore to remain loyal to the Polish Republic and to its popular democratic Government and to do nothing which might be incompatible with the interests of the state or injure its security or the integrity of its frontiers. Bishop Klepacz, Chairman of the Episcopate, explained that the oath was no more than an expression of the teaching of Christ: Give unto God the things that are God's and unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

For a communist Government, the Government of Poland have shown some moderation in dealing with religion and the church. Unlike Russia in the early revolutionary days, Poland has not made any open attempts to suppress religion. There have been no anti God processions nor have any churches been turned into anti God museums. A visitor to Poland is struck by the large number of churches, and the beauty of their architecture. Many of these churches were damaged during the war but their repair and reconstruction have been receiving as much attention as other buildings. At present there are in Poland 8,374 churches, 1,690 chapels and 2,000 convents and monasteries. Services are held in all these churches and are invariably well attended. The fact is that the Catholic church in Poland commands great prestige largely because it used to stand behind the nationalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In those days of tribulation, when Poland disappeared as a separate entity, the Church was the one bulwark against oppression at the hands of Protestant Germany and Orthodox Russia. When every familiar landmark had been submerged by a sea of troubles, the Church was the one rock of refuge to which men could still cling. It is the recognition of this fact which has instilled caution and restraint into the Government's dealings with the Church.

There is thus no open interference with religion in Poland. Yet the Government is creating conditions under which religion cannot flourish. Culture, as distinct from religion, is being developed; and in communist eyes culture is the best substitute for, and antidote to, religion. If religion is the opiate of the people in capitalist society, culture may be said to be the opiate of the people in communist society. Both make men forget the harsh realities of life. The essence of culture is to create a soporific feeling of elation in the workers' minds through the club, the cinema, the ballet, the metro, the Pioneer Palaces and the Parks of Rest and Culture dotted throughout the country. If culture has a sedative influence it is also corrosive. With the elimination of illiteracy and the spread of education, the spirit of reason begins to work among the masses. From the communist point of view, the danger is that the spirit of reason, which questions the magic of religion, may also begin to question the dogmas of communism. This danger is all the greater in Poland, where communism is associated with Russia and where Russia, because of its record in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is in the unforgetting Polish mind a symbol of foreign domination. It is this which makes the USA think hopefully of Poland as a fruitful field for its policy of 'liberation'. But the more the USA thinks of 'liberating' Poland—and that, too, by resurrecting the might of Germany which, in the last war, was responsible for the death of some six million Poles and nearly wiped Warsaw off the map of Europe—the more the Soviet Union will rivet its hold on Poland. The peaceful emergence of Poland as an independent state thus depends upon the growth of a will to peaceful co-existence on the part of the USA as well as the USSR.

POLAND IN FERMENT

IN June 1956 I accompanied our Vice-President, Dr Radhakrishnan, to Poland. I found Poland in a state of ferment. It was as if the whole nation had caught fever. No one knew precisely what its cause was or what its outcome would be. Some were delirious; almost all had a glow on their faces. Only those who had been thoroughly inoculated with Marxism remained immune.

The disease can now be traced to the XXth Congress, which was held in Moscow a few months earlier. Nowhere were its decisions acclaimed with greater enthusiasm. The Poles exaggerated the significance of the declaration that different countries were at liberty to follow different roads to Socialism. Within a few days of the Congress, five Ministers, including the Foreign Minister, fell from power. A Deputy Prime Minister, Jacob Berman, resigned. Romkowski, a former Vice-Minister of Public Security, and Fein, a Director in that Department, were arrested and put on trial. Political prisoners were released in hundreds, and former 'traitors', alive or dead, were wholly or partially rehabilitated. Most notable among them was Gomulka. Formerly General Secretary of the Communist Party and the late Bierut's rival, he had in Stalin's time been convicted of Titoism and other crimes and sentenced to imprisonment for life. He was now released.

In Poland the denigration of Stalin was heartily approved. Among Communist Parties in some other countries there was a lack of enthusiasm, and sometimes there was even criticism of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. In Poland there was no hesitation. The general attitude towards Stalin was expressed by Morawsky, Secretary of the Young Communist Party, who described him as 'a blood thirsty tyrant, suffering from megalomania, of which thousands of sincere communists became victims'.

The general ferment was reflected in the April session of the Sejm, the Parliament of Poland. The Sejm used to exercise no more power than its prototype in the Soviet Union, the Supreme Soviet. It met rarely and, when it did, just for two or three days, and its main function used to be to hear a report or two from Government spokesmen and to approve, without any real discussion, the decrees issued by the Government. But in the April meeting of the Sejm a new spirit prevailed. There were lively discussions. There was of course no attempt to discuss the merits and demerits of the communist system—that would still be heresy—but there was strong denunciation of various abuses, including the role of the security police in Poland. On one occasion, a few Deputies even voted against a bill. Hitherto, in Poland, as in the Soviet Union, the voting on all bills had always been unanimous. Now some Deputies had the courage to say 'Nay'. One was brazen enough to say openly that his objections

to a bill legalizing abortion, in certain circumstances, were based on his religious beliefs. Another Deputy asked why Cardinal Wyszyński had still not been released. Some demanded that the Sejm should take power to make changes in the budget and that corrupt and high-handed Ministers and officials should be brought to book. Thus, as Mickiewicz had said:

The big ones should slash the big,
The small ones should slash the small,
Until the whole villainy collapses
And the happy Republic is flourishing.

Such plain speaking had not been heard in 'People's Poland' at all. The Prime Minister, Cyrankiewicz, himself seemed to encourage it. In the course of his opening speech at the Sejm, he acknowledged the existence of the new atmosphere and 'the great wave of political activity surging throughout the country'. He declared that in future laws would normally emanate from the Sejm; decrees would be issued by the Government only in an emergency. Thus the Sejm would become 'the supreme controlling organ of the state'.

Intellectuals began to raise their voices even higher than politicians. The Polish Academy of Sciences objected to the subjection of science to political control, to the severance of contacts with foreign institutes and to that 'mania for quotations' in which intellectuals used to indulge. Economists severely condemned the ways of Polish planners, their juggling with facts and figures and their servility to the Soviet model. One of them, Dr Oscar Lange, even held up the Indian Five-year Plan as a better model for Poland to follow. Students were in a delirium of excitement; they received Dr Radhakrishnan almost as a Messiah. His well-worn homilies fell on far more receptive ears in Poland than in the USSR.

THE POZNAN RISING

IN July 1956 I was in London with Prime Minister Nehru who had been attending the Commonwealth Conference. There I heard of a serious rising in Poznań and returned post-haste to Poland. Western newspapers had described the outbreak as

a 'bread and freedom' rising Bread was the immediate demand of the workers, but it was the atmosphere of freedom, which I had noticed in Warsaw on Dr Radhakrishnan's visit, which made the rising possible

In Poznan, as elsewhere, the workers had many grievances Wages were low, norms were high and consumer goods were scarce There was a shortage even of bread. A delegation of workers went to Warsaw to represent their grievances They received a sympathetic hearing and returned to Poznan, but before this fact became known some mischievous persons spread a rumour that the leaders had been arrested, and a mass demonstration, which was to have taken place a few days later, was held

The demonstration was apparently intended to be peaceful The workers parading the streets were accompanied by their women and children In a few hours, however, the demonstration turned into a violent affair A jail, in which the workers imagined their leaders to be imprisoned was burst open and the inmates released Not finding their leaders among them, the crowd proceeded to the offices of the Party headquarters and the Secret Police and burned them down, and in the shooting which ensued 53 persons, including 9 soldiers, died and 300 were injured These are official figures Unofficial reports would put the casualties much higher How a peaceful demonstration suddenly became violent is not clear, but we in India know how the demonstrations of our own people, trained for a generation in non-violence, can take a violent turn

At first the official tendency was to throw the blame on the machinations of imperialists and the activities of foreign agents Soon, however, the Government came to the conclusion that the root causes were economic Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz took charge of the situation visited Poznan, reassured the workers that their grievances would be looked into and attended the funerals of the victims of the riots Even Ochab, Secretary of the Party, admitted that there had been serious errors on the part of the Government and the Party It was useless, he said, to throw the entire blame on imperialist provocateurs The 'social roots' of Poznan had to be unearthed and steps had to be taken to prevent a repetition of that 'soullessness towards workers' which was the fundamental cause of the Poznan rising

'Soullessness' towards workers!' That was an apt phrase. The basic error in Poland was to treat increase in production as an end in itself and not as a means to an end. The raising of the standard of living had been regarded as of secondary importance. On my various visits to Poland, I used to be amazed at the high prices and low wages and wonder how the people managed to live at all in such conditions. I was often reminded of a remark, made by Talleyrand, when some officials of the Foreign Office approached him for an increase in their salaries. Talleyrand refused to give any increase. 'We must live!' protested the deputation. '*Je ne vois pas la nécessité*', said Talleyrand.

Poznan compelled the Polish leaders to recognize that workers must live. But that was not enough. They also had to appreciate that the people of Poland desired to be free. Freedom, however, could not in the nature of things be unrestricted. It had to be reconciled with Russia's age-long quest for security and with the security of Poland itself, and especially its western frontier, which was dependent on the support of the Soviet Union. There was one man in Poland who was capable of performing this balancing feat. It seemed as if Gomulka, and he alone, could reconcile freedom with security, communism with nationalism. In July 1956 more and more people were turning to him as the sole hope for Poland. In October he was elected First Secretary of the Party in the teeth of opposition from the Soviet Union, just in time to save Poland from the glory and the horror of a revolution, the kind of revolution which overtook Hungary a few days later.

THE POLISH ROAD TO SOCIALISM

I WAS happy to pay a visit to Poland in January 1957 soon after my visit to stricken Hungary. To some extent, it lifted my depression over the condition of Hungary. Here was a country which was not lying prostrate by the side of its powerful neighbour, but a nation standing erect and marching on its own road to socialism. In Poland there was something of the spirit which Mahatma Gandhi introduced into the Indian scene in 1919. The people had shed their fear of authority and, at the same time,

were beginning to cultivate discipline. The Poles have always been patriotic, but their patriotism used to take wild, disorderly forms which invited ruthless repression. However, after their successful encounter with Soviet leaders in October and the election of Gomulka as First Secretary of the Party, they started combining prudence with passion, sense with sensibility. In this respect their conduct was very different from that of the Hungarians who, in dealing with the Russians, displayed greater valour than discretion. Barto, the chief of Protocol in Warsaw, told me that a saying had been going round that the Hungarians had behaved like the Poles and the Poles had been behaving like the Czechs!

Poland had at last found a leader, Gomulka. He had been attempting the difficult feat of combining nationalism with socialism, freedom with discipline, romance with reality—the romance of Polish patriotism with the reality of Russian vicinity. The stability of Poland's western frontier, and indeed, the existence of Poland itself, were dependent on Soviet friendship. With the example of broken Budapest before him, Gomulka was never tired of telling his people: 'You cannot rebuild Warsaw every ten years.'

The truth of this saying must have struck the Poles with singular force on the day of our arrival in Warsaw. It was the twelfth anniversary of the liberation of Warsaw. The city was decorated with white and red flags and inscriptions bearing the memorable date, 17 January 1945. A ceremony was held, at which 300 persons were decorated with the Warsaw Medal. Among the recipients were some who had defended Warsaw in September 1939, some who had participated in the Warsaw Insurrection in July 1944 and others who had fought in the liberation of Warsaw in the last stages of the war.

Gomulka's foreign policy was based on friendship with the Soviet Union. His domestic policy, however, was no servile imitation of the Soviet pattern. It is this difference which commended him to his people. The peasants were pleased because he applied the brake to the collectivization of agriculture and encouraged private farmers. Workers were associated with the management of factories, and Workers' Councils were established, somewhat on the Yugoslav model. The man in the street breathed more freely than he had done during the last ten years.

because Gomulka curbed the arbitrary powers of the Secret Police. Above all, Gomulka placated the Church by making various concessions. Freedom of religion was assured, and religious teaching was permitted in schools. Such teaching was optional, but in fact became compulsory because there was an almost violent return to piety, and no student could decline to attend the religious classes without incurring the opprobrium of his fellow students. Dr Oscar Lange told me of an example of religious fanaticism. A few days previously, some villagers near Cracow set upon a free-thinking teacher, threatened to drown him in the river, made him carry the cross from village to village and eventually forced him to install it in front of the school.

I wondered how enduring was the present alliance between catholicism and communism, for after all communism is basically anti-religious. For the time being, this alliance seemed unshakable, for Cardinal Wysinski was as determined to uphold it as Gomulka. As compared with Hungary, Poland was doubly fortunate. Poland had found an ecclesiastical head who was as astute and realistic as her political leader. In worldly wisdom, Cardinal Wysinski was as superior to Cardinal Mindzenty as Gomulka was to Nagy. He was one of those splendid opportunists whom the Catholic Church throw up from time to time. From the moment of his release, he had been emphasizing the need for unity and progress in Poland. In his first address after his release, he said that in the past the Poles had shown a singular aptitude to die for their country; now it was for them to show that they were also capable of living and working for it. In the recent elections he had exhorted the citizens of Poland to vote for the United National Front under the leadership of Gomulka. The elections took place on a Sunday; and the timings of the church services were adjusted so that duty to the state might be reconciled with duty to God.

The elections were a great triumph for Gomulka. They were very different from the kind of elections to which we are used in India. It was not a contest between parties as such. The three principal parties—the United Workers' Party, the Peasants' Party and the Social Democrats—had merged themselves into a United National Front and stood on a single programme. Yet the Polish elections were a landmark in the history of the communist world. For the first time there were more candidates

than seats. An elector could thus not only vote but, to some extent, elect. Local groups and organizations had a greater voice in the choice of candidates than ever before. Moreover the electioneering was brisk. For two weeks the administration was practically at a standstill, as the leaders of the Government had to go round the country explaining things and answering often embarrassing questions. Nor was there any lack of opposition. The Natolin Group and the ultra nationalists carried on a vigorous campaign for the boycott of elections and the defeat of the candidates in order to discredit Gomulka. And yet 99.5 per cent of the voters in his constituency voted for him, and 98 per cent of the voters voted for the United National Front. It was an impressive vote of confidence in Gomulka's policy. For thus the credit—or the responsibility—goes largely to the Catholic Church which sided with communist Gomulka with singular fervour. The attitude of the Church is typified by the nun who dropped her vote for Gomulka with the words 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, good luck to Gomulka!'

TWO YEARS AFTER 'THE POLISH OCTOBER'

'WHO is this man, Gomulka, who is selling us out to the West?' Khrushchev is said to have uttered these words on descending from his aeroplane when, on 19 October 1956, together with Molotov, Kaganovich and Mikoyan, he made a dramatic appearance in Warsaw. Elections to the Politburo were then in progress but the arrival of the Soviet leaders made no difference to them. Undeterred by the Soviet attitude, the Poles proceeded to select a Politburo after their hearts, practically eliminated the 'Stalinists', and elected Gomulka, who had been in the wilderness for eight years, as the First Secretary of the Party. Subsequently, Khrushchev, a realist of realists, acquiesced in the leadership of Gomulka and, as time passed, gave him his wholehearted support. Two days after the elections in Poland Hungary broke out into revolt and suffered the fate which Poland had courted and just escaped. I remember Bohlen, the American Ambassador, telling me how, at a party in the Kremlin, Marshal Zhukov had clenched both his hands and said, 'We could have crushed them [the Poles] like that.'

Almost exactly two years after these events, 'this man, Gomulka' was an honoured guest of the Soviet Government. On 24 October 1958 he came to Moscow at the head of an imposing delegation which included Zawadski, the President, Cyrankiewicz, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and others. They visited Georgia, the Ukraine and Belorussia and attended the celebrations of the 41st anniversary of the October Revolution. Theirs was a triumphal progress; no foreign dignitary, except possibly our Prime Minister, was ever given a more enthusiastic reception.

Khrushchev took pleasure in exhibiting Gomulka, as he had exhibited Tito in 1956, as the product of his policy: soon after Stalin's death, Khrushchev had gone out of his way to cultivate good relations with Tito. Gomulka's re-entry into politics was also facilitated, however involuntarily, by the decisions of the XXth Congress, of which Khrushchev was the architect. Subsequent events have proved Khrushchev's wisdom in supporting Gomulka's leadership in Poland. The invitation extended to him to visit the USSR was part of Khrushchev's effort to consolidate the Socialist camp—a task in which he has been engaged ever since Hungary nearly broke away in 1956.

The visit was useful in consolidating Gomulka's position in Poland. He had to tread warily between the Stalinist and revisionist elements. After the awful example of Hungary, revisionism became a greater menace than Stalinism. 'Just as you cannot cure flu with T.B.,' said Gomulka, 'you cannot use tubercular revisionism to cure the flu of Stalinism.' Nevertheless, there were still some Stalinists in the highest organs of the Party in Poland, lying in wait for Gomulka's blood and boasting that the Soviet leaders were behind them. The affection and respect with which Gomulka was received in the Soviet Union cut the ground under their feet.

The reception Gomulka received in Warsaw, on his return from Moscow, was warm but not enthusiastic. It showed that he was no longer the national hero of 1956. In that year he had been carried to power on the crest of the wave of nationalist feeling which swept Poland after the XXth Congress. The Poles regarded him then as a patriot first and a communist next. Since then he has been appearing more and more in his native colour as a communist first and foremost. He is a sincere believer in the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat, which in effect means

the dictatorship of the Party In asserting this dictatorship he has had to curb the very elements which brought him to power In 1957 *Po Prostu*, the organ of youth, was banned, and this led to serious disturbances in Warsaw and elsewhere Censorship of the press was re imposed, and the Writers' Union was subjected to pinpricks Strikes were declared illegal, contrary to Gomulka's previous attitude that a strike was essentially a symptom of some malaise which required remedy The relations with the Church, too, became somewhat strained though religious instruction was still permitted in schools and Party members could still practise religion, though not too ostentatiously

Yet to one who went to Poland from Hungary, as I did, the surprise was not that there were some restrictions on freedom but that there were so few The surprise was the greater when one remembered how ebullient the Polish temperament was, as Gomulka once said, there was 'a strain of anarchism' in his people In Poland, there were no arbitrary arrests or secret trials, and the law courts were functioning normally There, more than in any other communist state, the rule of law was in force The Secret Police was no longer the terror which it used to be in Stalin's days The written word, it is true, was subjected to control, especially in politics, but Polish tongues wagged freely, and there was unrestricted freedom in the sphere of music, painting and drama The editorship of the *Nowa Kultura* had changed but the journal was still expressing its views on cultural matters with a surprising degree of freedom Slonimski, the liberal-minded President of the Writers' Union, sent a message of congratulations on behalf of the Union to Pasternak, when the Nobel Prize was awarded to him Among the writers in communist states, Slonimski was the only one who had the courage to do so He did not come to grief on that account When, however, I mentioned to a young writer, since muzzled, that I was pleasantly surprised to see the extent of freedom still existing in communist Poland, he replied grandiloquently that he did not believe that freedom was a commodity which could be rationed I told him that his sentiment was magnificent but it was not politics Poland could not escape her own geography and history, and until there was a genuine *détente* among the Great Powers, the most that the Poles could hope for was a rationed enjoyment of that rare commodity, freedom

HUNGARY

A FAIRY ISLAND

ON 24 February 1953 I woke up as usual at 6 a.m., according to my watch, and found myself in a fairy island in the arms of the Danube, with Buda on one side and Pest on the other. Anujee was fast asleep, and Prakash Kaul was next door. I looked out of the window and found a celestial play in progress. The lord of the night, an almost full moon, was gravely descending to mate with the river below. His effulgence was too much for the stars to bear; they were nowhere to be seen. Suddenly a big black cloud came up, as if to forbid his approach to the river, and blotted him out. And the stars reappeared, laughing at their master's discomfiture. I then remembered that I had not set my watch right the previous evening; it was 4 a.m. by local time, not 6. So I went to sleep again and woke up a couple of hours later.

In Moscow I used to be awakened every morning by the harsh, grating sound of a horde of hefty women scraping the snow off the ground. In Budapest there was no snow to be cleared. Though it was winter, there was no snow even on the distant hills. It looked as if we were in a land which was a stranger to snow. Anujee and I were happy to see the familiar brown earth again after having been in that sea of snow which is what Moscow is in winter. We experienced the same feeling of comfort as we had done when, ten years previously, we went to Kunming and saw the sun, after having been for months in fog-bound Chungking, where the appearance of the sun was so rare that there was a local proverb: 'When the sun shines, dogs bark.'

Margaret Island is a lovely spot, and we stayed there again and again until we acquired a Legation building of our own in 1958. The island owes its name to the daughter of a Hungarian king of the thirteenth century, who became a daughter of God and immured herself in a nunnery. During the Middle Ages the island was dotted with monasteries and nunneries, and the atmosphere was ideal for meditation. Today it is the favourite resort

of men and women who are keen, not on their souls' salvation, but on physical fitness, not on religion but on culture. Margaret Island is full of gymnasiums, swimming baths, football fields and open air theatres.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

My first impressions of the Hungarian people were distinctly pleasant. The men were of small build, compared to Russians, and the women were comely. Marjai, the Chief of Protocol, took us to Sztalinvaros, a giant steel city rising by a bend of the Danube, a hundred kilometres from Budapest. We went into a workers' restaurant and I was struck by the beauty of the women who came in. 'How beautiful your women are!' I exclaimed. Marjai knows a little English and likes to use long words, and he replied, 'If I may be permitted to be chauvinistic I must acknowledge that our women are good-looking.'

From the restaurant we went into the workers' apartment overlooking the Danube. To see the river which I had often imagined while listening to the enchanting strains of 'The Blue Danube' was a great event. I was sorry to observe that the colour was far from blue, but Marjai said that one had to be in love in order to see the Danube as blue. In the apartment to which Marjai took us we were greeted by a young Hungarian girl who was a vision of beauty. When we came out of it I exclaimed how blue the Danube was, and Anujee reluctantly agreed.

In some ways the atmosphere of Budapest was different from that of Moscow. Hungary, it is true, had gone communist. Wherever we went we saw pictures of Rakosi flanked, and almost hemmed in, by the figures of Lenin and Stalin. Every office, factory and almost every shop-window had a photograph of him. He was always referred to in glowing terms—'Wise Father of the Hungarian People', 'Our Party's Master-thinker', 'Great Son of Hungary', 'First of the Hungarians', and 'Stalin's Best Hungarian Disciple'. Stalin himself was treated as a demigod. In the dining room of our hotel were inscribed in golden letters the words 'Glory to the Great Stalin who liberated Hungary from Fascist hordes'. Communism, however, did not seem to have

gone deep into the hearts of the people. They spoke far more freely than Russians. In Stalin's time I often used to wonder whether the entire population of Russia had not taken a vow to remain silent, especially in the presence of foreigners and more especially about politics. The Hungarians had no such inhibitions and did not seem very suspicious of foreigners. This is surprising, for the world had treated them hard. At one time, from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, Hungary was a power in central Europe. It was a bridge between the East and the West and a rampart of Christianity against the onset of paganism. At that time, there were as many Hungarians in the world as Englishmen, but today Hungary has but nine million people against the fifty million of Great Britain. From the fifteenth century onwards, Hungary became a constant object of aggression from the East as well as the West.

Yet the spirit of Hungary has remained unbroken. Indeed, the very survival of the Hungarians as a national entity is a miracle. I realized the secret of this miracle when I saw the national opera, *Laszlo Hunyadi*, by the great Hungarian composer, Ferenc Erkel. Its story is briefly told. The king and the aristocracy of Hungary are jealous of the popularity of Laszlo Hunyadi, the son of the redoubtable general, John Hunyadi, who had inflicted crushing defeats on the Turks in the middle of the thirteenth century. A group of aristocrats, headed by Urik Cillei, the king's uncle, forms a conspiracy to get rid of Laszlo Hunyadi, but the conspiracy is discovered and Cillei is killed by Hunyadi. The king, moved by the entreaties of Hunyadi's mother and the remembrance of the services rendered by his family to the State, then forgives Hunyadi and promises that no harm shall come to him. In the next scene the king falls in love with Hunyadi's fiancée, Maria Gara, the daughter of the palatine, the highest official in the country. The palatine, wishing to be the power behind the throne, encourages this and, in order to facilitate his daughter's marriage with the king, frames false charges against Laszlo Hunyadi. The king, only too glad to have a pretext, breaks his oath, casts Hunyadi into prison and has him beheaded.

Some of the songs in *Laszlo Hunyadi* are known and sung throughout Hungary. When, on the death of Cillei, the people in the streets lustily sang, 'The Oppressor is dead', the entire audience seemed to vibrate with patriotic emotion. Indeed, this

song became so popular that in Hapsburg times the censors would not permit the performance of the opera unless it was omitted. Erkel composed another opera, *Dózsa*, glorifying the Hungarian peasant revolt of 1514. That opera ends with a song by an invisible chorus, 'Better centuries will bring victory'. 'That better century has now come' said a note on Erkel which was given to me by an official of the Protocol Department, but I could not help thinking that the people of Hungary must still be singing in invisible chorus, 'Better centuries will bring victory'.

IN A WINE CELLAR

ALMOST the first institution which the Hungarians showed me with pride was a wine cellar. They are as proud of their wines as they are contemptuous of vodka. But in Hungary the temperature does not fall 30° below zero. I have drunk wine, off and on, for 35 years, but in doing so I have always kept in mind a piece of sound advice given by Confucius. When one of his disciples asked, 'Master, is it permissible for men to drink wine?', the sage replied, 'Men may drink wine, but not beyond the point of mental confusion'. I am glad I have never touched that point nor, except in Budapest, had I approached it.

The first time I tasted wine was at Oxford on 11 November 1918. I was brought up in a puritan household where drinking was regarded as an evil. I had thought that I would keep away from drinks even in Europe, but 11 November 1918 was a special occasion. After four years of war peace descended on earth. The Germans sued for an armistice. We had a great dinner in Christ Church, followed by a great bonfire, and then we retired in batches to our rooms and started talking, singing and drinking until the sun rose slowly over the Meadows.

I thus began the pastime of drinking on a historic day in the world's annals, and I have indulged in it, in strict conformity with the precept of Confucius, in different parts of the world. 'Scotch' in England, wine in France, vodka in Russia, *sake* in Japan and *shao shing* in China—I have tasted them all. Of all these, I would regard the Chinese way of drinking as the most delightful. They never drink before or after dinner, then one

has to be content with tea. But at dinner, in between a dozen or two dozen courses, wines in dainty cups, often slightly heated, flow endlessly and are drunk ceremoniously in a series of toasts, accompanied by the word 'Kampe' (bottoms up) and bowings to one another. If the Chinese way of drinking is the most refined, I would regard the colonial way of drinking in the East as the crudest. They used to imbibe quantities of whisky before, at, and after dinner—mostly before, on empty stomachs. There was no form or ceremony about it. It was just one way of bearing the white man's burden and forgetting the troubles of the tropics—the heat, the buzzing mosquitoes, the stupidity of the servants, the ineptitude of Orientals and the impertinence of politicians demanding freedom.

While I have tasted wines in different parts of the world, I had never been in a wine cellar. The wine cellar of Budapest was in a cave, a veritable labyrinth. It ramified in all directions and if I had been left there I would have found it difficult to find my way out. The temperature was kept at a constant level, which was easy, as there was some 60 feet of earth above the cave. Incidentally, this saved the cave from bombing during the war. But if they were unable to bomb the caves, the Germans could destroy them in other ways. I was told that they deliberately wrecked the cave-cellar at Tokay and let out the wine, which flowed into the streets in a multicoloured stream. In the cellar which we visited the wine was stored in tanks, some made of stone and others of concrete, the concrete tanks being lined with glass. The size of the tanks was enormous; some of the workers' apartments which we had seen on the previous day could easily go into them. On each tank was a description of the contents; origin, name, date of manufacture and the percentage of alcohol.

After having been in the cellar for about half an hour, the Vice-Minister for Food and Drink suggested that we might now perhaps taste some of the wines. We agreed, little realizing what was in store for us. We were taken into a room, done up as a tavern and tastefully decorated with Indian and Hungarian flags. Well-dressed waitresses were in attendance; and we all took our seats at a table, which was groaning with sandwiches, pastries, cakes and nuts. There came a procession of eighteen different wines, served exquisitely to the accompaniment of lyrical descriptions read by a member of the staff. Here was a wine, grown in sand;

there one grown on the mountains Here was the pearl of Lake Balaton, there was the famous Tokay, grown on the Tokay ranges When we had tasted all those eighteen varieties made in Hungary, the Vice Minister said that perhaps I would now decide which was the best Taken aback, I got up and said that I would tell them frankly which wine I liked best and hoped that they would forgive me for my candour 'The red wine,' I said, 'was better than the white, and the white, better than the red The dry wine was better than the sweet, and the sweet better than the dry The highland wine was better than the wine of the sands, and the lowland wine was better than the wine of the mountains' My audience was in a mood to enjoy these remarks I told them that in India people used to drink wines three thousand years ago The favourite wine, to which there were references in the Vedas, was called *sura*, those who drank it, the Suras, were gods, and the Asuras, or non drinkers of wine, were demons 'And this evening,' I said, 'we are all gods' And divinely we drank a toast to Indo-Hungarian friendship

SPORTS, SEX AND SERVANTS

I VISITED Budapest again in the summer This time I was accompanied by Ram Sathe and Shaila We left Moscow for Budapest at 2 30 a m and dozed away until we reached Kiev at daybreak There we made a bee-line for the restaurant Shaila was an optimist, to our amusement and the amusement of the waitresses, she asked for soup and shashlik She had to be content with weak tea without milk or lemon Another three hours' flight and we were in Budapest

In Budapest I stayed in the same delightful hotel on Margaret Island and in the same suite of rooms as in March last Only Anujee was not with me 'Why, then,' asked Shaila, 'have you an extra bed in your room?' 'Just for emergency's sake,' I replied And Shaila laughed heartily, as she always did at my jokes however puerile

One evening I was alone at our table in the dining room of the hotel My companions had deserted me I did not blame them, for all day we had been together We had gone on the Danube

in a motor-boat to a lovely spot called Visegrad, some 60 kilometres from Budapest. That was enough for the day, and more than enough, for me and my back. Ram, however, was still in a roving mood. Shaila sportingly offered to stay with me, leaving her husband to roam about, as was his wont, in a tram. 'No,' I said, 'the evening is balmy and the moon will soon be out. Your place is at your husband's side.'

I must confess that I was glad to be alone. Not having anyone to talk to or to listen to, I could freely watch the manners and humours of the people. All around, in the dining-room, in the lounges, on the lawns, was a vast throng of men and women eating, drinking, dancing and merry-making. How good-looking they were! And how well turned out! Not so daintily perhaps as in Paris, but not so shoddily as in Moscow. Though communist, Hungary does not have that superior proletarian contempt for personal appearance which marks the people of Moscow; they take a bourgeois, or human, pride in their looks and dress. Many men, however, were wearing open collars.

The open collar was in vogue partly because it was summer and chiefly because sport was in the air. The place was teeming with sportsmen as a number of teams had come on from the great Youth Rally at Bucharest, which had been attended by some 30,000 delegates from all parts of the world. In our own hotel we had Rumanians, Albanians, Chinese, Koreans, Indonesians, East Germans, Poles and Czechs; and a number of international matches were in progress on the spacious playgrounds of Margaret Island.

Hungary is pre-eminent in the realm of sport. It is indeed remarkable that a nation of only 9 million people should have obtained 16 gold medals and many other prizes in the Olympic sports in 1952, and stood second only to the Soviet Union and the USA. This was the result of the intensive attention paid to the promotion of sports in Hungary. No trouble or money is spared on the training of youth, the encouragement of sports clubs and the construction of stadiums. A large stadium, large enough to accommodate 90,000 people, had just been completed in Budapest. This attention to youth is a striking feature of life in Hungary as it is in Russia. Labouchere, my British colleague, said that it was simply frightening.

Though Hungary had definitely come into the Soviet orbit,

its customs and manners differed greatly from those of the Soviet Union. Take, for instance, the attitude towards sex. On Margaret Island, all around our hotel, there were winding paths, shady avenues and cosy corners where lovers could be seen at all times of the day, fondling and cuddling each other. One evening we went for a stroll after a late dinner and found, on the embankment in front of our hotel, a number of couples, wrapped up in each other, oblivious of the world, oblivious even of the blood-red, bracket shaped moon rising over the Danube. These were sights inconceivable in Moscow. The most that lovers are permitted to do in parks and other public places in Moscow is to hold hands. If they prove more venturesome, a militiaman taps them gently but firmly on the shoulder and says, 'Enough, comrade, enough!' The Soviet Union, which shocked the world by its original proclamation of the doctrine of free love, is now almost Victorian in its conception of the relations between the sexes. Unmarried mothers, it is true, are supported by the state, but this is not so much for the sake of the mothers as for the sake of the children, of whom, after the twenty million casualties in the last war, the Soviet Union stands in need. But the sanctity of the marriage tie is emphasized in every possible way, co-education is discouraged, divorce is difficult, and any undue exhibition of sex on the stage or on the screen is severely frowned upon.

If lovers in Hungary behaved differently from those in the Soviet Union, so did waiters. In Budapest the waiters, especially the head waiters, sub managers and managers, treated customers with a solicitude unknown in the Soviet Union. In their behaviour there was a touch of obsequiousness which would not be tolerated in the USSR. One petty hotel dignitary after another would come and inquire how my Excellency was faring or what my Excellency wished to have for dinner. This treatment even began to affect my morale. One evening, feeling a draught from a window behind me, I asked that it should be closed regardless of the wishes of the others in the dining room. The next day, after scanning the two dozen items on the menu, I sniffed at them all and ordered something which was not on the menu—risotto with chicken. Later on I reflected that others in the dining-room must have thought me a 'bourgeois decadent' perhaps or an Indian princeling. I resolved never again to draw attention to myself in such ways.

HISTORIC BUDAPEST

My third visit to Budapest was in the winter of 1954. I was unable to go far out of the city as Hungary had experienced a severe winter and the roads had been badly cut up by the snow. Nevertheless, we ventured out to a minor hill resort, called Dubogoko. Our rickety old car groaned over a number of hills until it came to a dead stop within a few miles of our destination. A kind friend gave us a lift; and then we had to wait until another car came from Budapest and fetched us in the evening. We spent the time in an indifferent restaurant, tasting indifferent food and making up indifferent limericks. Still the journey was worthwhile, as it gave us an unusual view of this jumble of hills. The rolling countryside, covered with snow and wrapped in fog, looked like a blurred photograph, taken from a tilted aeroplane by some crazy photographer.

I was specially disappointed not to have been able to go to Lake Balaton. I would have liked to take my companions, Pillai and Devi, to that lovely spot, Balatonfured, where Tagore had nursed his heart trouble some twenty years ago and planted a tree which was still well looked after. But I was told that the road to Balaton was impossible and that the lake itself was frozen. Nevertheless, we had no lack of that delicious fish, *fogas*, which is found in Lake Balaton and nowhere else and which was Anujee's staple diet in Budapest last year. I was told that fishing in a frozen lake was an extremely hazardous business. Devi's difficulty was more fundamental. How, she asked, could fish live in a frozen lake? Would they not have to come up every now and then to get a breath of fresh air?

In Budapest the most magnificent building was Parliament House. It was built in neo-Gothic style at the end of the last century and is handsomely sited on the Danube. 'Rather too big a building, isn't it, for our small country,' said our guide, a college student, shyly. I chivalrously told her that greatness did not depend on size: after all Athens, the fountain of European civilization, was only ten square miles in extent. Her reply was unexpected. 'Ah,' she said, 'but our Attila destroyed the civilization of Athens and of Rome!'

We also went round the old Roman ruins. It was a raw

morning It had been raining the previous night, the roads were muddy, and there were pools of water here and there Still, it was exhilarating to wander amidst the ruins of a city called Aquincum which flourished 2,000 years ago and then vanished until it was unearthed by the archaeologist's spade at the end of the nineteenth century We saw a great amphitheatre and imagined how Roman matrons must have looked down at the gladiatorial shows where their barbarian prisoners were made to kill one another 'to make a Roman holiday' We saw the walls of a Roman military camp which could accommodate 8 000 people We saw Roman baths, hot and cold, so elaborately and luxuriously fitted up that they called to our minds the old saying that the Roman Empire was destroyed by wine, woman and the bath We saw articles of daily use, such as spoons, scales and necklaces We saw a unique water organ, and ornamental barrels for wine and oil We saw gravestones on which were carved carriages to take the deceased to the other world We saw pictures of satyrs and nymphs, and statues in honour of Venus and Eros We saw temples in honour of the Sun-god, Mithra We saw even a pre Roman Celtic temple, and on the ruins of the Celtic temple was a Christian church

From the Roman ruins we proceeded to the Royal Castle An early Hungarian king had built a stronghold here in the thirteenth century, but it was not till the time of King Matthias Corvinus in the fifteenth century that it began to be used as a royal residence In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Hungary was part of the Turkish Empire, the Turkish Governor General lived here and lorded it over the Hungarians with a pomp and hauteur which a British Viceroy of India might have envied The Castle then fell into decay and was ruined during the wars between the Turks and the Christians It was re erected in the time of Maria Theresa and considerable additions were made to it towards the end of the last century Alas, the Castle is now in ruins again Before evacuating Budapest, the Germans destroyed it brick by brick, with characteristic German thoroughness

One building, however, has escaped damage and that is the oldest building of all It is a church which was founded by King Stephen in A D 1015 It was demolished by the Tartars in the twelfth century, rebuilt in the thirteenth, turned into a mosque by the Turks in the sixteenth century and carefully restored in the

nineteenth. It is a fine specimen of Gothic architecture. It was its founder, King Stephen, who introduced Christianity into Hungary. The Pope sent him a crown, studded with gems and bearing a double cross, which was used for the coronation of the kings of Hungary for nine hundred years. Sik, the Foreign Minister, told me that the crown was at present in the hands of the Americans, who got it from the Germans. Negotiations had been in progress for its restitution, for there was a popular belief that whoever held the crown would wield sovereignty over Hungary. The Americans were apparently reluctant to return the crown. 'Are they hoping to rule over Hungary?', I asked. 'No,' he replied; 'but perhaps they are hoping to restore the Hapsburg monarchy!'

In 1087 King Stephen became Saint Stephen. When the royal vaults were opened in 1083, forty-five years after his death, it was found that his right hand had remained miraculously intact; and the Pope proceeded to canonize him. Thereafter, year by year on 20 August, St Stephen's right hand used to be taken through the streets of Budapest in solemn procession, attended by the Primate of Hungary and other civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries. The ceremony has been abandoned now, and 20 August is celebrated as Constitution Day.

When we went into St Stephen's church the service was on. The music was very different from the spontaneous, almost chaotic, but melodious, singing of Russian churches. Here the singing was instrumental, from a fine organ, and the congregation sat in pews instead of standing about helter-skelter, as in Russian churches. There was a solemnity about the entire ritual which was enhanced by the dim, religious light, filtering through the stained-glass windows depicting the Madonna and her Child. Seeing a crowd of worshippers, Devi joined them and lit a candle and offered a prayer. I knew what her prayer was, though she did not tell me. 'You had better call him Stephen, if it is a boy,' I said. 'No,' she replied playfully, 'I shall call him Sivan.' Sivan is the first part of my double-barrelled name; and I was tempted to tell her the story of the Vicar who, interested in his flock, asked a woman in the parish how many children she had. 'Four, thank you,' she said. 'Don't thank me!', said the Vicar gravely.

P.S. St Stephen was kind. The boy was born in Moscow exactly nine months later.

ST GELLERT'S HILL

ONE September evening, accompanied by Chary the silent, I went up to St Gellert's Hill. On such excursions Chary is a good companion, he makes you feel that he is there and yet not there. You can thus have the benefit of human companionship without its inconveniences, you can pursue your train of thought and take in the beauty of nature without the interruption of a human voice. Chary never speaks unless he is spoken to. The only occasion when he burst into speech was when Anujee told me over the telephone from Moscow that a Russian girl had accused—as it turned out, unjustly—a cousin of his with a fruitful intimacy. 'I am perplexed, Sir,' said Chary then.

St Gellert's Hill is almost a microcosm of Hungarian history. Half-way up the hill stands the statue of Bishop Gellert, who came to Hungary in the beginning of the eleventh century to preach Christianity, but was set upon by the heathen populace and hurled down from the precipitous crags of the hill where his statue now stands. At the top of the hill is a long, straggling building, erected by the Hapsburg emperor in the middle of the nineteenth century as a citadel in commemoration of the defeat of the Hungarian patriots who had risen for freedom in the 'year of revolutions', 1848. And, at the very crest of the hill, is a mighty monument to commemorate the liberation of Hungary in 1945, with the inscription '1945—To the Soviet Heroes—the Liberators—from the Grateful Hungarian People'. Thus the statue of Gellert, the citadel near it, and the monument in honour of Soviet soldiers represent three epochs in Hungarian history, namely the early, indigenous, illustrious monarchy of Hungary, the long night of Hapsburg rule, and the red dawn of communism.

It was now dusk and we walked round the top of the hill and saw a lovely sunset. In India, too, and particularly in the hill stations, September is the season for lovely sunsets. There a few straggling clouds from the monsoon would remain, catching the last rays of the sun and breaking them into a thousand fragments of light. In Budapest the sunset was different. There were no clouds, the air was crisp and clear, and the sky looked, not as if it was pierced by shafts of light, but suffused by the glow of

many waves of colour, following one another in quick succession. It looked as if some mysterious impresario was giving a magic lantern display in the sky. Suddenly the display ceased; the sky became grey and white and finally black; and the earth, as well as the sky,

Lit her glimmering tapers
Round the day's dead sanctities.

This melancholy hour touched my heart too with a tinge of sadness. I thought of a boy, very dear to me, and wondered what effect the sun and the moon and the stars were now having on him. I also thought of another person, whom I had loved so tenderly and so sincerely, and without whom no joy seemed complete. And then Chary and I descended from the hill—Chary, silent as ever, and I, heavy with thoughts that lay too deep for tears.

STORM

IN the summer of 1955 I visited Budapest again with Anujee. As usual we stayed on Margaret Island. I have seen Margaret in all her moods—sometimes fog-bound and snow-covered; at other times blazing in the sun. I have seen the Danube flowing freely around her, a protecting stream. I have also seen the Danube lying around her, lifeless and frozen. In winter this island would be bare, leafless and cheerless; in summer, a garden of flowers. Thus I had seen Margaret in different seasons, but this was the first time I saw her drenched in rain.

One night, when Anujee had been on an all-day excursion to Lake Balaton, I spent the evening in bed, mostly reading the stories of Rudyard Kipling, full of cholera and smallpox, broken loves and ruined lives. I also read—or re-read—the pathetic letter which Harriet Shelley wrote just before she committed suicide. Anujee came back from Lake Balaton tired and somewhat disillusioned, for there had been too many people there for her taste. We had a tender conversation in bed about men and things, gone from us for ever. While talking about her parents she said that she had a feeling that it was time she joined them. Thus it was in a mournful mood that we went to sleep.

A few hours later I was woken up by the sound of rain and thunder. At first I thought it was my imagination. I thought that Kipling's description of the thunderstorm, which nearly washed away a newly built bridge over the Ganges, had projected itself into my dreams. But no! Peals of thunder followed one another in quick succession. It looked as if Indra, the God of Thunder, had rolled up the globe like a parchment and was tearing it to pieces or was pounding it to bits like a ball. His fiery messengers came right into our room and cast their glow as if they were searching for victims. Half asleep I thought the lightning would strike us dead. Indeed, lest my body should look too indecent after death, I tied up the strings of my pyjamas which had somehow become slack. All this time Anujee was sleeping peacefully like a child. Since my childhood, I have had a primeval fear of thunder and lightning.

In this island I have experienced much joy and sorrow, much elation and depression. Here my disk slipped, I hope for the last time, causing me unbearable pain. Here I heard helplessly of Stalin's death and was too ill to return to Moscow and attend his funeral. Here also I experienced much mental agony for other reasons. On the other hand there came many pleasant memories, memories of the devoted care with which Anujee looked after me when I was ill, the zest with which Ram used to make up White Ladies to entertain our guests, Shaula's gay chatter and Devi's immaculate conception.

I also reflected on the various vicissitudes through which Hungary had passed. No state had reacted more avidly to the changes in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. When I came here in March 1953, Rakosi was at the height of his power. He was both Prime Minister and Party Secretary, indeed he was a second Stalin. By August 1953, when I paid my second visit, Rakosi had ceased to be Prime Minister and Imre Nagy had taken his place, determined to reverse his predecessor's policies in many respects. During my third visit, in February 1954, one could see a struggle for power between Nagy and Rakosi. When I visited Hungary in December 1954, it looked as if Nagy had won. But in the spring of 1955, Nagy was accused of Rightist deviationism and an anti-Party, anti-Marxist attitude and dismissed not merely from the post of Prime Minister but from the Party itself.

Is this the end of the story, I wondered. Has the tussle between Nagy and Rakosi been finally resolved? In Nagy two forces met, communism and nationalism. Nagy was as genuine a communist as Rakosi, but he was also a product of nationalism, that Hungarian nationalism which had sullenly defied and gloriously outlived centuries of Turkish, Hapsburg and German domination. Rakosi, on the contrary, belonged to that school of communism which suspected all nationalism, both the genuine variety and that sophisticated type which bred chauvinism and imperialism. Yet the strength of Russia lies in the fact that there communism and nationalism have merged into an irresistible force. That is also the strength of China. In the countries of Eastern Europe, on the contrary, there is a latent discord between indigenous nationalism and imposed communism. The struggle between these forces was represented in Hungary by the rivalry between Nagy and Rakosi. I little suspected how tragic its outcome was going to be. On the day on which I wrote my diary about the storm on Margaret Island, I did not dream that a year later the whole of Hungary would be swept by a political storm, the sound of which was heard, and the fury felt, in every corner of the world, so much so that even now, five years later, the 'problem of Hungary' remains, an example of its impotence, on the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

I PAID a visit to Hungary in the second week of October 1956, barely a fortnight before the Hungarian revolution. At that time we did not think that a revolution was imminent. The people had indeed many grievances, but it seemed that an attempt was being made to remove them.

Rakosi was gone. He had posed for a decade as the Iron Man of Hungary; and, like Rasputin, he seemed indestructible. Though a Jew, the anti-Jewish purge at the end of Stalin's rule did not affect him. Though a Stalinist, the death of Stalin did not affect him either. Though an embodiment of 'the cult of personality', the campaign against that cult left him untouched. Though the antithesis of the spirit of the XXth Congress, he survived

the changes effected after that Congress. But a storm had been gathering against him. The people's indignation knew no bounds and burst on 27 June 1956 at an all-night meeting of writers and intellectuals, known as the Petöfi circle, which lasted from 6 in the evening to 4.30 the next morning and was attended by some six thousand people. There Rakosi and his doings were roundly denounced and the open demand was made that he should go. At last he went, pleading ill-health and confessing his 'errors'—a euphemism for the most abominable crimes.

With the Iron Man of Hungary also went the Iron Curtain. Along the 125-mile border between Hungary and Austria there had run a barbed wire fence in two parallel belts, 12 feet deep, with watch-towers 30 feet high, manned by frontier guards and floodlit at night, and mines had been laid in the space between the barbed-wire belts. Now, when I accompanied Rani Chanda to Vienna, I noticed that this had gone. The barbed wire had been dismantled, the mines had been removed and the watch-towers had been demolished. Little did I expect then that within a month the Iron Curtain would again descend on Hungary.

Writers and artists began to breathe a freer air. I was invited to a ballet called *The Marvellous Mandarin* by a Hungarian musical genius of the twentieth century, Bartok. Under the short lived communist regime of 1919, Bartok was Director of the Musical Academy. The Horthy government disliked him. Because of his international reputation they could not persecute him openly but they subjected him to so many pinpricks that he left Hungary for the USA in 1940 and died there in 1945. The communist government also disapproved of his music, as his themes and style did not conform to the patterns laid down by the Party. The theme of *The Marvellous Mandarin*, which was written 30 years ago, was altogether unusual. Three apaches keep a girl in order to lead visitors into their house and then to rob them and sometimes murder them. The first customer, an old roué, is robbed of his money by the three apaches and murdered, and his body is thrown into a cellar. The second is a callow student who has no money and is thrown out of the window. The third is a dignified Chinese mandarin who at first sternly rejects the girl's advances. Before long, however, he is smitten by desire for her. At that moment the three apaches set upon

him, stab him and leave him dead. The mandarin suddenly comes back to life and grapples with his assailants and overcomes them. They attack him again and hang him; again he comes back to life and pursues the girl. She surrenders, his desire is satisfied and he falls down dead.

The moral, if it can be called a moral, is that desire triumphs over death. All the incidents are shown most realistically on the stage to the accompaniment of weird music and vigorous dancing. This ballet had not been allowed to be shown in Hungary for twenty years. That it should now have been shown was an indication of the extent to which art had, on the eve of the revolution, freed itself from the domination of the Party.

On 6 October we watched a macabre ceremony. Soon after Rakosi's fall, many communists, alive and dead, who had been his victims, began to be rehabilitated. Among them was Rajk, one of the principal architects of communism in Hungary. He had fought, and been wounded, in the Civil War in Spain against Franco; and his ruthless measures as Minister of the Interior in Hungary from 1947 to 1949 were largely responsible for the establishment of communism. Yet in 1949 he was executed for Titoism, espionage on behalf of the USA and conspiracy to assassinate Rakosi—crimes to which he duly confessed. After the XXth Congress, however, the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Hungary passed a resolution to the effect that Rajk, a genuine communist, had been unjustly condemned. On 6 October his remains were exhumed, together with those of three of his colleagues who had also been executed as Titoists, and all were buried with full military honours at the Central Cemetery. At that ceremony Mrs Rajk was the chief mourner. Since her husband's execution, she had been living in disgrace in a distant village and had even been compelled to change her name, but now she was honoured as a patriot and a patriot's wife.

Within less than a month the revolution broke out, Mrs Rajk again found herself on the losing side and was obliged to flee from Hungary.

THE MORROW

I VISITED Hungary after the revolution as soon as I could get permission to do so. The plane and train services to Budapest had been dislocated, and had not yet been resumed. I therefore flew from Moscow to Vienna and from there went by car to Budapest. At the Austro Hungarian frontier, a very polite Russian Colonel met me and told me that he had been instructed to escort me to Budapest. So I proceeded to Budapest with two Russian cars, full of armed soldiers, one in front and the other behind. 'We are in no danger,' said the driver of my car, 'it is *they* who are liable to be shot at.'

I stayed again in that fairy island, Margaret. Now the fairy was gone. In her place there seemed to sit an old, old woman full of memories of the past, and forebodings for the future. Both the entrances to the island were guarded by Russian tanks manned by Russian soldiers. The hotel, where it used to be so difficult to get a room was half empty. The great dining room was no longer used, the diners moved into a smaller and gloomier room. There was no music. How often had the haunting strains of gipsy music kept me awake in this hotel till the small hours of the morning! Now the musicians had gone. So had all the younger waiters—to exile and safety, and those left behind walked about dazed, bemoaning their fate. Gone, too, were the handful of adventurers who had crossed over from Austria when the border between Austria and Hungary was thrown open. By their part in the revolution they had given a slender excuse to the Government to dub the revolution a counter revolution.

It was on a Saturday that I arrived in Budapest. On Saturdays and Sundays all Budapest used to flow into the Margaret Hotel to eat and drink and dance. Now the only visitors were a few Russian soldiers, asking for beer, and the ubiquitous Secret Service agents trying in vain to conceal their identity.

Budapest was terribly damaged, Pest more than Buda. Nalin Nanavati, who accompanied me, thought that parts of Pest looked like the war ravaged Italian towns which he, as a soldier, had helped to reduce to ruins. Hundreds of buildings had been burnt out, many more had collapsed, and thousands had gaping holes caused by tank shells. Everywhere piles of debris were being

cleared by men with set faces. The tram-lines, torn up during the revolt, were being repaired; and the buses and railway wagons which had served as barricades were being removed. Amidst all this destruction I saw an old woman in black placing flowers on one of the many fresh graves by the side of the road. She was mourning for one of the many thousand Hungarians who had laid down their lives, and it must have been little consolation for her to know that several hundred Russians too had been killed.

It was at dawn on 4 November that the people of Budapest, who had enjoyed four days of unregulated freedom, when they vented their wrath on the hated AVOs, the Secret Police, in the most gruesome ways, were awakened by the rumble of thousands of Russian tanks. A month later, on 4 December, I watched a procession of mourners assembling at the tomb of the Unknown Hero in front of the National Museum. Women and children came from all parts of the city, with flowers in their hands and songs on their lips. What they were singing I could not make out; it was not sufficiently mournful for a dirge or sufficiently stirring for a national song. Russian tanks were there already; they started regulating traffic and shoving people about. I was told that one of the women slapped a Russian soldier, spat on him and bared her breasts to him and asked him to shoot. The soldier chivalrously refrained; but the next day, when there was a procession of men, some of them were shot down.

Hardly a day passed when there was no demonstration of some kind or other, and the air was full of wild rumours. In the meantime, the factories were idle, the production of coal was at a standstill and the workers resorted to passive resistance on the Gandhian model. Indeed, they invented a term 'kartal', connecting 'hartal' with Kadar. On the whole, the atmosphere in Budapest was reminiscent of our civil disobedience days in India. But the Hungarians had to face tanks instead of lathis.

I returned to Moscow in the beginning of December, leaving Khosla, our Ambassador in Prague, to keep an eye on the situation. I reported my impressions, and made certain representations, to the Russian Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs in Moscow. I then returned to Hungary again and spent Christmas and the New Year in Budapest. Budapest was depressing, though not quite so depressing as during my last visit. The debris had been cleared from the streets, the tram-lines had been

repaired, and the hastily dug graves by the roadside had been moved to more decorous resting places. The offices had begun to function and the workers were beginning to work. Russian soldiers were no longer to be seen. Russian tanks had also disappeared though a piercing eye might still glimpse some in the side streets. The hotel in Margaret Island was again beginning to attract visitors. Music had returned to the island, though some of the best musicians had fled to Vienna and beyond. So had many ballerinas, including Chinadiora, whom I had seen as Maria in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. On the whole, life was beginning to creep back into Budapest.

The government of Hungary was anxious that Budapest should appear normal during Christmas week. It flooded the shops with consumer goods in the hope of concealing the desperate economic situation of the country. Christmas trees could be seen everywhere, and for the first time in a decade Christian hymns were broadcast over the government radio. On Christmas eve, the curfew was lifted so as to enable the people to go to midnight mass. On the whole, Christmas was celebrated in Budapest with a certain mournful gladness. Cardinal Mundzenty was still in the US Legation, but Father Christmas, whom Rakosi had kept in chains, was at large, and the people hoped that he would bring a New Year present for them in the form of a more acceptable government.

In this they were bitterly disappointed. Early in January the government issued a declaration making it clear that the most that the people could now expect was a measure of reform within the steel frame of Marxism. The Hungarians were not content with this, nor had they any leader of Gomulka's calibre to persuade them to accept it. The political leaders whom I saw told me that the Hungarians would continue to non-co-operate with the government. I visited a wagon factory at the invitation of the Foreign Office and was surprised at the political awareness, courage and volubility of the workers who surrounded me. 'Why don't the Russians go home?', 'Why can't we have free elections?', 'Why can't we live like Hungarians?', they asked. This factory, founded in 1844, had been supplying wagons and turbines to countries far and near, including India, Egypt and Argentina, and it had a labour force of about 8,000. Not a man had cared to join Kadar's new party.

Even armed violence had not ceased. Rahman and I toured the Bakony Hills, where armed 'rebels' were said to be at large. A few days previously Soviet tanks had vainly combed the forests in a search for hidden arms. The government's hold on this region seemed to be somewhat tenuous. We had a talk with a padre in a remote village who was hand in glove with the revolutionaries and introduced us to a few of them. I failed to see what such isolated resistance, active or passive, could achieve against the might of Russia, but such conduct was wholly in keeping with the character of the Hungarians. There is a splendid strain of dare-devil extravagance in them which scorns all considerations of prudence and compromise. Every now and then they have thrilled the world with their heroism. Dr Germanus, an eminent Arabic scholar in Hungary, gave me a poem in which Matthew Arnold captured the thrill that went through Europe on the occurrence of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848:

To the Hungarian Nation

Not in sunk Spain's prolonged death agony;
 Not in rich England, bent but to make pour
 The flood of the world's commerce on her shore;
 Not in that madhouse, France, from whence the cry
 Afflicts grave Heaven with its long senseless roar;
 Not in American vulgarity,
 Nor wordy German imbecility—
 Lies any hope of heroism more.
 Hungarians! Save the world! Renew the stories
 Of men who against hope repelled the chain,
 And make the world's dead spirit leap again!
 On land renew that Greek exploit, whose glories
 Hallow the Salaminian promontories,
 And the Armada flung to the fierce main.

We are not so naive as Matthew Arnold. We are a hardened generation. We have been nourished on a diet of revolution and war, served hot and cold. In India, thanks to the gospel of Mahatma Gandhi and the sanity of Great Britain, the price paid for freedom was comparatively slight. But in other countries, the god of freedom has appeared

enwound

With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned;

and we are tempted to ask him.

Whether man's heart or life it be that yields
Thee harvest, must Thy harvest-fields
Be dunged with rotten death?

FAILURE OF A REVOLUTION

ON my return from three months' leave in India, in May 1957 I again visited Hungary. The experience that remains uppermost in my mind is the visit to a small cemetery in Pest. We drove past the graves of Endre Ady, the poet, Bachony, the first Prime Minister of Hungary, and Deak Ferenc, 'the wise man of Hungary,' and stood in front of the Kossuth monument. This monument had been erected in memory of the great Hungarian patriot who, having fought in the Revolution of 1848 and lost, remained in exile for half a century rather than set his foot again in a subject Hungary. Some years later, his remains were brought from Turin and buried in Budapest. On one side of the Kossuth monument were rows of fresh graves, covered with fresh flowers. Among the inscriptions they bore were the names of teen-age children, some no more than 16 years old, who had fought and fallen in the revolution of 1956. A little removed from these graves, near the Kossuth monument, was a place reserved for the graves of honoured personages. Among them I saw the name of Rajk who had been shot as a traitor in 1949, but whose remains had been exhumed and honourably reburied in this spot a few weeks before the revolution. There were also many graves of AVOs, on whom the people had taken unholy revenge during the revolution. All the graves looked alike except that the graves of the fighters for freedom bore crosses while those of the AVOs did not, for they were true, and therefore godless, communists. The mothers of both the AVOs and their victims mourned over their children and condoled with one another. 'Here at last,' said Szots, a Hungarian film producer, 'is co-existence, here is democracy!'

The thought of these children haunted me the whole night. Had they died in vain? Was the revolution a failure? I recalled the fourteen demands which the 50,000 students and workers of Budapest had made in a moment of exuberant enthusiasm

on that lovely autumn day in October 1956 and which they had read out at the foot of the statue of that poet-patriot, Petofi, who fell in the revolution of 1848. They demanded the return of Imre Nagy as Prime Minister; free elections; freedom of speech and freedom of the press; the withdrawal of Soviet troops; an amnesty for political prisoners; the punishment of Rakosi and Mihaly Farkas; the encouragement of individual farmers; the abolition of the system of compulsory deliveries; the substitution of a minimum wage for workers in the place of the much-abused system of norms; the restoration of March 15 as the National Day instead of April 4; the abolition of Russian as a compulsory subject in schools; the introduction of religious classes; the removal of the Stalin monument, 'that symbol of tyranny and oppression'; and the restoration of the old Kossuth crest in place of the crest which had been introduced after the communist revolution. Of these demands, none was successful, except that the statue of Stalin was demolished by the students and workers in the first delicious hours of delirious freedom. Imre Nagy had been called back, but was soon forced treacherously into exile. There was no near prospect of an election, let alone of free elections, and parliament had prolonged itself for two years. There was no greater freedom of speech or freedom of the press after the revolution than before. Nor was there any prospect of a withdrawal of Soviet troops. Russian had been re-introduced as a compulsory subject. Religious teaching was permitted in schools, though the students who attended religious classes and their parents were closely watched. The National Day continued to be celebrated on 4 April instead of 15 March; and the Kossuth crest, which the government had agreed to adopt five months previously, was abandoned as 'an imperialistic and chauvinistic symbol'.

The abandonment of the Kossuth crest was a grave affront to national sentiment. Based on the old Hungarian crest, it consisted of a shield divided vertically into two halves—the left half containing four white stripes, denoting the four rivers, the Duna (the Danube), Tissa, Drava and Sava; the right half showing the three mountains, Mutra, Futra and Tutra—and on top were a symbolic crown and the double apostolic cross. The reason given for the abandonment of the Kossuth crest was that, of the four rivers shown thereon, two were no longer in Hungary; the

Drava was in Yugoslavia and the Sava in Czechoslovakia. Similarly, of the three mountains, only Mt Mutra was in Hungary; Mt Futra was in Czechoslovakia and Mt Tutra was partly there and partly in Poland. The adoption of the Kossuth crest, it was said, would stimulate irredentist tendencies among the Hungarians, and the Czechs, the Poles and the Yugoslavs would view it with concern. As well might Turkey complain of Mt Ararat on the Armenian shield or Pakistan demur to the mention of Sind in the Indian national anthem!

Thus, to all intents and purposes, the revolution was a failure. Seeing the plight of his motherland many a Hungarian must have recalled the touching lines of one of Hungary's greatest poets, Endre Ady

With Magyar, twisted ant-hill soul,
Lost Magyardom do I bewail
Gone is the whole
Our very sorrow is now stale

And our ideals elsewhere all are
But worn out rags in dreadful plight,
We go to war
Yet know how useless is the fight

Trudging, we spin our destiny
With spindles made from others' scraps
And what care we
If suddenly our life thread snaps!

* * *

I know not what may be the aims
Of this false life besprent with gall,
Yet in the flames
For them would I sometimes throw all

But what imports my misery,
However sad, however poor?
Weeping I see
The sufferings of my race are more

We missed the aim, our darts are spent,
• We have outlived our lives of late

A circus tent

Awaits us and a buffoon's fate.

The Hungarians have had many revolutions in their history, none of which has been successful. I sometimes think that the Hungarians are true disciples of the Gita: they resort to action without thinking of the consequences thereof. Yet the Hungarian revolution cannot be called a failure. It is such revolutions which have kept the nation alive. And it is this spirit which keeps the lamp of freedom burning, or at least flickering, not only in Hungary but throughout the world.

TWO YEARS LATER

I PAID a visit to Budapest in the second half of September 1958 for the twelfth time. During my previous visits I had stayed in Margaret Island. Now I stayed in our own Legation. It is situated on an eminence in Buda and commands an even more delightful view than the Grand Hotel in Margaret Island. Below us lay the Danube and its seven bridges, Pest with its churches and towers, and Buda with its hills and dales. And over it all autumn cast its multicoloured kimono.

When I visited Budapest in the autumn of 1957 she was still licking the wounds she had sustained during the revolution, but by 1958 the scars had disappeared. The city looked brighter than ever before. Damaged buildings had been repaired and newly painted. The streets were better lit. Even neon lighting had appeared in Budapest. The city was like a woman who, having had a scuffle with her neighbour and been badly knocked about, puts on an extra coat of paint to hide any traces of the bruises on her face.

The shops in Budapest, too, were fuller than ever before. They had a greater variety of goods. Nagy had been executed and Malenkov had been banished to the wilds of Kazakhstan, but the policy primarily associated with their names, namely the encouragement of consumer goods, had come to stay. The insane concentration on heavy industry which took place during the Rakosi regime had been given up. The pressure on workers had been relaxed; and their wages had been increased by 15 per cent. The peasantry had been relieved of the obligation to

make compulsory deliveries of their produce to the government. Private enterprise was cautiously encouraged, and private tailors, cobblers, carpenters and even machine-makers set up shops.

On the whole, so far as economic development was concerned, the government had learnt a lesson from the mistakes of the past and was trying to avoid them. Politically, the situation was different. The revolution had become counter-revolution, Imre Nagy had become a traitor and suffered the fate of a traitor, and a White Paper was issued on 'The Counter-Revolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy and his Accomplices'. The Security Police had come back in full force, though they were no longer as cruel as they used to be in Rakosi's time. Workers' Councils, which had played a vital role in the revolution, were disbanded and their leading members arrested and imprisoned. The Writers' Federation, which had prepared the minds of men for the revolution, was suppressed. Prominent writers, some of whom were lifelong communists, were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment, and those who had been left free and were too self-respecting to be Party hacks took refuge in silence. The University Youth Organization, which had played a valiant part in the revolution, was merged in the officially sponsored University Youth Federation. It became increasingly difficult for the children of the bourgeois classes to obtain admission to the universities, though admission was ostensibly regulated by an entrance examination. Lawyers received special attention. 1,700 out of 3,100 lawyers in Hungary were debarred from practice. In Budapest alone, over 50 per cent of the 1,300 lawyers were debarred. Among them were old men—one was 82 years old—and men with large families, and the only way in which they could now keep body and soul together was to take to manual work for which many of them were unfit. These lawyers could expect little sympathy from the Minister of Justice, who was a shoe-maker.

The second anniversary of the revolution passed off without incident. Absence from office on that day was treated as an offence and even the wearing of a black tie was forbidden. The cemeteries were guarded by soldiers to prevent the relations of those who fell in the revolution from laying flowers on their graves. However, nothing seemed to affect the ebullience of the Hungarian character. At a party given by me and organized by Rahman,

Hungarians of all strata of society—writers, lawyers, doctors, actors and officials—turned up in elegant clothes and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The party was meant to be from 6 to 8 p.m., but some of them stayed on till midnight.

THE TRAGEDY OF MAN

I PAID a visit to Hungary again in November 1958, to assist at the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Hungary. On 18 November, newspapers in Budapest wrote leading articles on the growth of Indo-Hungarian relations. Prime Minister Munnich gave a dinner in my honour and I gave a reception. I also appeared on television and gave a talk which was broadcast. In the course of my talk I said that from time immemorial Hungary had lain in the path of invaders from the East as well as from the West and that the spirit of the Hungarian people had survived it all. This sentence was left out of some transmissions, evidently because some official was nervous that some people might be reminded too poignantly of the latest exhibition of the spirit of the Hungarian people in the autumn of 1956.

At dinner Munnich was in a reminiscent mood. He told us that he had commanded the Third International Brigade in Spain on the side of the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. After the war was over, the French tried to enlist him in the French Legion. They told him that since he had had experience of warfare, it was not necessary for him to join as a private and they were prepared to enlist him as a sergeant! When he refused to join the French Legion on the ground that he had no quarrel with the Arabs, the French put him in a concentration camp and subjected him to various tortures, of which he gave us vivid details. 'So, you see,' he said, 'I knew which side to join in 1956.'

My most interesting experience in Budapest was to see a play called *The Tragedy of Man*, written by a Hungarian author, Imre Madach, in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is a vast parody on civilization from the earliest times to the present day.

The Tragedy of Man begins in the Biblical manner with Adam and Eve in paradise, tasting the forbidden fruit of knowledge, and Lucifer, 'the spirit that eternally denies', goading them to

self-destruction. Lucifer unfolds to Adam in a dream the fate awaiting humanity through the ages. The scene shifts from one centre of civilization to another—ancient Egypt, classical Greece, Imperial Rome, medieval Europe, Revolutionary France, capitalist Britain and a phalanstery or a primitive communist state. Adam takes bodily form as various historical characters such as Pharaoh, Tancred, the Crusader, Kepler, the Scientist, and Danton, the Revolutionary. None of the systems under which he lived could satisfy him, each contained within itself the seed of its own destruction. Finally, frustrated and disgusted, Adam decides to commit suicide, when Eve whispers in his ear that she is with child. Adam then realizes that humanity must somehow go on and abandons his decision to take his life.

In his first incarnation, we see Adam as a Pharaoh, taking pride in his pyramid which

No earthquake, no disaster, can destroy,
 'I will show when man was mightier than God

Adam's peace of mind, however, is disturbed by the appearance of Eve as the wife of a slave who perishes in the construction of the pyramid. Lucifer tells him

The matter is really not worth thy notice,
 We'll have a slave the less on earth

Thousands of men are employed on the construction of the pyramid

'What,' exclaims Adam, 'a million to die for one!' 'Don't rave,' says Lucifer, for after all

the common herd
 Is doomed and fated as a beast to be,
 To bear the burden and to tread the mill,
 For that it was created

In the next scene, laid in Athens, we see 'the common herd' in action. There is a vast multitude awaiting the triumphant return of General Miltiades, the victor at Marathon. Some demagogue denounces him as a traitor and the crowd echoes this cry—some out of envy, others out of cowardice, still others out of a desire simply to swim with the tide. That was the vaunted

Democracy of classical Greece! And the general is led away to the scaffold, exclaiming with his last breath:

Now I know how vain is liberty
For which throughout my life
I have always battled.

From democratic Athens, the play moves on to Imperial Rome. But the Roman Empire has fallen on evil days. Men and women are given to the pursuit of pleasure. Gladiators, prostitutes, voluptuaries and the devotees of Epicurus throng the stage. Retribution overtakes them in the form of the Black Death. Semi-savage hordes lay their hands on the fringes of the Empire and will soon destroy the citadel itself. Above them all appears St Peter holding the Cross and proclaiming

New and mighty thoughts
Of Brotherhood and Individual Freedom
Which soon shall shake the pillars of the world.

The next scene shows that Christianity too is unable to lead man to happiness. We see Adam, reincarnated as Tancred the Crusader, in Constantinople, but Constantinople is the scene of bitter religious strife. Arianism is treated as an even greater menace than Islam. The Christian patriarch orders the followers of Arius to be led to the stake 'in God's high honour'; and Eve, now reborn as a virgin, is sacrificed to religious fanaticism. 'Not peace but strife I bring into the world,' Jesus Christ had said; and these words have come ironically true. Such has been the history of all religions:

The spirit flees, the carrion corpse survives
And with its foul stench poisons the new world
That rises round it.

The conflict between Religion and Science is brought out in the next scene. Adam is reborn as Kepler in Prague and Eve as his wayward wife, Barbara, reflecting the unhappy marital relations between the author of the play and his wife. Kepler makes brilliant scientific discoveries, but they are little appreciated by the people. The orthodox are ranged against him because some of his discoveries run counter to the premisses of Christianity; and the Emperor bids him remember that after all the Holy

Church is 'thy true Mother' Kepler's society wife nags him constantly for money, and, for her sake, he has to sell charms and horoscopes, though his heart is with

The dark night, aflame with the glittering stars
And the mysterious music of the spheres

We skip a few centuries and see Paris in the throes of the Revolution Adam, as Danton, is addressing a surging mob and inflaming them with the magic words, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity The Revolution, however, is marred by violence Eve, now the sister of an aristocrat, is dragged to the scaffold Her prayer for mercy falls on deaf ears

When hast thou known a storm to slow its way
Because a rose implored it to delay?

The mob, at once fickle and ferocious, dances with blood-stained weapons around bleeding heads stuck on pikes Soon violence overtakes the revolutionaries, and Danton himself is denounced by Saint-Just Like many a revolutionary before and after him, Danton cries

I sit upon my Throne and count the heads
Which fall from it beside me day by day, ¶
And wait and wait, until my turn shall come

From eighteenth-century Paris we move on to nineteenth-century London Adam now appears as an observer at a fair which is being held between the Tower and the Thames There are aristocrats, prostitutes, beggars, gipsies, clowns, flower-girls selling violets, designing mothers exhibiting their daughters, bogus doctors selling love philtres and elixirs guaranteeing long life, and the vulgar crowd which 'finds delight in sorry liquor and inferior music' It is the heyday of capitalism Society is based on the principle of competition which simply means that

Those who re armed
Pit themselves against defenceless rivals

Unemployment is rife and a clamour is raised for the reduction of wages When the workmen plead that they have to maintain their families, an employer asks

'But who the devil tells them to get married?
Why must each man have half a dozen brats?'

Adam is distressed by the spectacle of 'greed and jealousy lurking everywhere'.

In the next scene we find ourselves in a phalanstery, 'the camping place for the Man of the New Age'.

Now the whole world is one great Fatherland
And all our comrades have a common aim,
While, watching over our lives' soft-flowing course,
There stands an honoured sentinel named Science!

Science has performed miracles. It has eliminated useless animals, like the dog, man's companion in former ages, and the ox,

The poor man's slave in other ages
When, like the ox, the poor toiled for the rich.

The pig and the sheep however survive because Science has not yet found substitutes for them, but they have no longer the original shape which bungling Nature gave them; now the pig is all fat and the sheep is all meat and wool. A scientist, who has delved into the past history of mankind, shows his students a metal called gold:

a most amazing ore

Far-famed on earth and yet absolutely useless.

And a flower, called the rose:

a useless flower—

With millions of its sisters, it would steal

The fertile acres from the waving corn.

If there is no room for beauty in the new utilitarian state, there is no room for love either, maternal or marital. All children belong to the state. When her child is taken away from her, a mother protests vehemently, but an official explains to her that the state will perish if the ancient prejudice in favour of foolish family ties is revived. And the love of Adam for Eve in their new incarnation in the phalanstery is frowned upon. Their case is submitted to a scientist and he gives the verdict.

A romantic man and a nerve-ridden woman

Beget weak offspring. Therefore they are unfit to mate.

Adam protests that he is in love with Eve. The state is shocked that such ancient madness should still persist and orders Adam and Eve to be taken to the madhouse. Adam protests that

All in the world
That hath been great and noble had its birth
In just such madness as ye would restrain!

This act contains a delightful satire on the way in which men of genius are treated in a phalanstery. Plato is accused of dreaming while he works:

‘Thou hast been so wrapt up in phantasies
That thou hast let this cattle stray.
To keep thee wide awake, thou’lt kneel on peas!

But Plato protests:

‘Even when I kneel on peas, I dream!’

Similarly Michelangelo is accused of having left his workshop without permission. He explains:

‘Yes, I was tired of making legs for chairs . . .
Such dreadful legs, of an atrocious shape!
I had entreated them to let me change them
And fashion them in a more ornate way.
But they refused. As a relief, I wished
To make the backs. I begg’d them all in vain.
I was in danger of insanity . . .
The torture was too great . . . I left the workshop’

And Adam, the hero of the play, bemoans:

‘Oh, Michelangelo! It must seem Hell
To thy great heart if thou mayst not create.
How many whom I knew I here behold,
How many men of genius, power inborn!
With one, I fought Another died a martyr.
For that one there, the globe had seemed too narrow.
And now how uniform, how cramp’d, the State
Has made it! . . . Lucifer, let us begone.
My soul can bear this spectacle no longer.

After a brief glimpse of the pitiful state of man in the Ice Age which overtakes the earth, Adam returns to paradise and decides to hurl himself from a cliff into the abyss below and commit suicide. He is saved from it by Eve’s announcement that she is with child and the Lord’s exhortation:

‘Hark to me, Man! Strive on, strive on and trust.’

I told Prime Minister Munnich how greatly I had enjoyed *The Tragedy of Man*. He said that he did not like the play; it was too pessimistic and it reflected the frustration of the people of Hungary after the abortive revolution of 1848. I was too polite to ask him whether the suppression of the revolution of 1956 had also not left some frustration behind. I merely observed that anyhow the play ended on an optimistic note:

Hark to me, Man! Strive on, strive on and trust.

'Trust in whom?', asked Munnich. In the play, man is torn between his trust in God and in Lucifer. In the studio of Strobl Kisfauldi, who executed the stupendous Statue of Liberation on Gellert Hill, I saw a magnificent piece of sculpture, depicting man as a sublime figure, with his eyes uplifted towards heaven, and by his side Lucifer, massive and cunning, trying to turn man's gaze away towards the pomp, power and pleasures of this world. Strobl showed me a letter from Bernard Shaw, dated 19 November 1939, in which he had written:

Why flatter man by making him tragic and beautiful? Make a colossal and godlike figure, seated on a throne, looking with serene amusement at three little figures in the palm of his hand, ridiculously trying to bayonet one another and resembling Chamberlain, Daladier and Adolf, with as many lovely angels as you like leaning over the back of the statue as amused spectators smiling like XIII-century Madonnas.

Munnich's question to me touched man's perennial dilemma from time immemorial. In whom or what is he to put his trust? In priests or princes, soldiers or politicians, dictatorship or democracy, religion or science, non-violence or the hydrogen bomb, or, as in *The Tragedy of Man*, in God or in Lucifer? Perhaps the best advice is contained in the *Bhagavad Gita* which makes that clarion call for self-reliance:

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानम् नात्मानमवसादयेत्
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुः आत्मैव रिपुरात्मनः

Raise yourself by your Self and never let your Self be abased.
The Self is your sole friend even as it is your sole enemy.

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